

GENDER DYNAMICS OF THE *SMALL HOUSE* PHENOMENON IN THE HARARE
METROPOLITAN PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE

by

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I declare that GENDER DYNAMICS OF THE *SMALL HOUSE* PHENOMENON IN THE HARARE METROPOLITAN PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE is my own work and that all sources that I have cited have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



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ABSTRACT

The *small house* phenomenon amongst the Shona people in contemporary Zimbabwe forms part of the relationship and household arrangements amongst certain heterosexual couples. In cases where partners engage in *small house* relationships, it has specific implications for existing marriage and family dynamics. The study sought to address the question: What are the perceptions on gender dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon as an emerging family structure in contemporary Zimbabwean society? The relative newness as well as the secretive nature and complexity of the *small house* relationship, render the nuances of gender dynamics in such contexts worth exploring to add value to the Sociology of Families and gender dynamics. The research was conducted in Harare metropolitan province and adopted social exchange theory and African feminism to illuminate the gender dynamics in *small house* households. It utilised a qualitative research paradigm and employed in-depth interviews to collect data from 30 participants who were purposively sampled. Findings of the study reveal that although the *small house* relationship may at times be informed by the ideals of traditional Shona polygynous marital practices, it differs in several respects with polygyny as it attempts to adapt to the socio-economic demands of the 21st century. The study uncovers that the social exchanges in *small house* relationships are not only gendered, but also based on inequalities relating to class, age and lineage. The *small house* relationship at times perpetuates gender inequalities between the partners involved. The study exposed how certain *small house* relationships were inundated with a myriad of problems including gender-based violence, financial constraints and increased susceptibility to HIV and AIDS and other STIs. Problems experienced in *small house* households are often exacerbated by the secretive nature of the relationship. Furthermore, a form of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity, which are manifestations of the deeply entrenched patriarchal hegemony in the Shona culture, results in asymmetrical intimate relations. It was also revealed that *small house* households may inadvertently violate children's rights, including opportunities to access and secure education and social security. Reportedly, disengaged fatherhood in the context of the *small house* can affect children's welfare and socialisation negatively.

Key terms: polygyny, *small house*, masculinity, femininity, sexuality, patriarchy, absent fatherhood, lone parenthood, social exchange theory, African feminism

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACRWC:	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AIDS:	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CRC:	Conventions on the Rights of the Child
DHS:	Demographic Health Survey
ESAP:	Economic Structural Programme
FGM:	Female Genital Mutilation
FTRR:	Fast Track Land Reform
HIV:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
LAMA:	Legal Age of Majority Group
NGP:	National Gender Policy
RCMA:	Recognition of Customary Marriage Act
STIs:	Sexually Transmitted Infections
WLSA:	Women and Law in Southern Africa
WLLG:	Women and Land Lobbying Group
ZANU:	Zimbabwe African National Union

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM SETTING AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study explored perceptions of the origin, and the social and gender dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon. The *small house* is an informal long-term sexual relationship between a married man and a woman, other than his spouse, which is not socially sanctioned by society (the *small house* phenomenon is conceptualised in greater detail in the next section). Although *small house* relationships are generally not acknowledged by Zimbabwean society, involvement in such unions may be commonly known in communities but hidden from the husband's family and in-laws. The understanding of gender dynamics in marital or sexual relationships is critical for informing policies that address women's issues and the welfare of children growing up in such contexts. Gender dynamics can be further understood by demonstrating how perceptions on femininity, masculinity, patriarchy and sexuality in the African context may mediate interaction patterns between partners in *small house* relationships. The study also explored the nexus between gender dynamics in *small house* relationships and how children are raised under such circumstances. The combination of the social exchange theory and African feminism created a robust framework that illuminated the nuances and complexities of gender dynamics in *small house* relationships. The study focuses on the Shona ethnic group which is the largest in Zimbabwe.

1.2 THE SMALL HOUSE DEFINED

Sexual relationships in all societies have always been dynamic and mediated by different historical and socio-economic dispensations. The *small house* phenomenon is one such sexual relationship that has emerged and proliferated in contemporary Zimbabwean society, especially in the urban centres. The *small house* term was popularised in the early 2000's during a phase of impending economic and political crises and chaos in social relations which saw an apparent rise in multiple concurrent partnerships, extramarital affairs, pre-marital and intergenerational sex (Mushinga, 2015). The practice of having clandestine female partners is not peculiar to Zimbabwe, though the practices may be very different in other societies; for example different terms are used such as concubines or mistresses in Europe, *diriyande* in Senegal, *ndogos* in Kenya and *disquettes* in Dakar among others (Zeitzen, 2005). Such practices reveal the incidence of multiple concurrent sexual partnerships in many contemporary

societies. Various authors have defined the phenomenon of the *small house* in various ways in the last few decades.

Chingandu (2008) defines a *small house* as a form of concurrent multiple relationships in which a man is having a regular sexual relationship with another woman while at the same time continuing to have sex with his current wife. Nyathi (2015) elaborates that the *small house* is a Zimbabwean specific social term coined in reference to an unmarried woman who has an illicit affair with a married man. Mushinga (2015) espouses that a *small house* is a colloquial derogatory term used in Zimbabwe to describe a woman in quasi-polygynous, long-term informal and usually secretive relationship with a married man. Mutsetsa (2016) concurs and adds that the *small house* is a 'marital' practice which allows the extension of the monogamous marriage institution into a quasi-polygynous system, in a nostalgic cultural way, creating links between two ideologies; that of modernity and cultural adherence.

The *small house* appears to have several parallels with the African traditional polygynous marital practice, however, Mutsetsa's definition falls short because a *small house* relationship cannot be defined as a marriage since it does not observe any marital rituals and hence it is not sanctioned by society. One major difference between the *small house* and polygyny is that polygynous families have a degree of female solidarity and at times conflict between co-wives because they usually live together or in close proximity. This is clearly different from a *small house* relationship which is kept a secret. Another observation is that polygyny comes with specific responsibilities both for the wives and for the husband. In this new socio-economic dispensation, the hierarchical responsibilities inherent in this relationship operate fundamentally different from the secretive and unsanctioned *small house* responsibilities between partners. Meekers (1993:35) observes that the traditional Shona marriage was a contract between two families rather than a personal arrangement between two individuals and such a union was sanctioned by the payment of *roora*. Bourdillon (1997) further espouses that any marital union that does not involve the payment of *roora* will be interpreted differently, for example as causal sex or prostitution. By implication the *small house* union is thus not a marriage because it is usually a result of the consensual arrangement between two lovers and in most cases there is no *roora* paid to the women's parents. However, in rare cases, *roora* is actually paid for the *small house* but the relationship remains a secret to the legal wife and her children. Even under such circumstances the *small house* remains socially unsanctioned by society and hence cannot be regarded as a marriage.

Due to the sexual nature of the *small house* relationship, children are often part of the *small house* household, although in some cases they were born prior to the onset of the current *small house* relationship. Karanja (1987) views the *small house* as a practice wherein a man has sexual relations with a woman over a lengthy period with the possibility of having children whose paternity is acknowledged by the man who supports the ‘house’ financially despite the relationship being secret. It would seem that one condition in such relationships is that the man provides (or is at least expected to provide) for the upkeep of the *small house* and the children living there. In this regard, Chambati (2012) describes the *small house* as a woman who is in a relationship with a married man and receives similar, albeit less, benefits to those of a wife. These benefits vary according to the means of a man providing them. Such sentiments seem to suggest that, women involved in *small house* relationships may be poor, disempowered, lacking sexual agency and engaging in survival transactional sex. However, the evolving *small house* phenomenon in Zimbabwe involves women from different socio-economic and socio-political backgrounds and hence women’s involvement in *small house* relationships may not necessarily be perceived as a result of desperation and lack of economic support (Mushinga, 2015). In other words, pinning women’s motivations for engaging in *small house* relationships to lack of empowerment, sexual agency and poverty has excluded other groups of women; the educated and economically stable. Small housing (the act of having a *small house*) generally involves women and men from varying socio-economic backgrounds. Mushinga (2015) observes that framing women’s sexual behaviours within contexts where sexuality is seen as a variant of poverty, significantly undermines an in-depth and broad understanding of the nuances and complexities of African women’s agency and sexuality.

It can thus be observed that the *small house* is a recent cultural practice in Zimbabwe in which the Western concept of monogamous marriage is upheld nominally but in actual fact the husband keeps another secret family. In this regard, Bourdillon (1993:35) on the Shona culture observes “where a man lives in circles where polygyny is frowned upon, he might acquire a second unofficial wife and she is maintained in a separate household”. It can be deduced here that Bourdillon is talking about a *small house* because a wife cannot be unofficial and kept secretly. Christiansen (2013) further postulated that the term *small house* is derived from the historical practice of polygyny in which men had a senior wife (*imba huru*) literally meaning ‘big house’ and a junior wife (*imba diki*) literally meaning ‘small house’. Though the children born to the *small house* relationship are kept a secret from the man’s original family and in-

laws as well, they are regarded as legitimate by the law and can benefit from the father's estate as long as they produce birth certificates that confirm their paternity (Chambati, 2012). The major difference between a marital relationship and the *small house* relationship is that there are no marital rites conducted for the *small house* relationship and that the *small house* relationship is maintained secretly. Although unrecognised by the family and community, within the private space of the *small house*, a woman takes on the duties associated with a second wife. She is expected to wait on her partner for social, emotional and economic support as well as sexual gratification. In this regard, the *small house* phenomenon may be perceived as a product of people wanting polygynous unions but failing to secure proper social and legal sanctions. According to Delius and Glaser (2004:85) many observers have assumed a close connection between the tradition of polygyny and contemporary multiple sexual partnerships for men. However, it seems polygyny is transforming into more subtle relationships like the *small house* relationship.

For this study the operational definition for the *small house* relationship is that it refers to a secretive long-term relationship between a married man and another woman where both consent to the relationship and develop an emotional attachment. Usually, no marital rituals are observed and the man is expected to provide social and economic support while the woman acts privately (but never publicly) as a second wife. Parties in this relationship assume a tacit agreement that the needs and demands of the legitimate wife, her children and her household will always receive preferential treatment.

1.3 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Gender dynamics in marital and sexual relationships in Zimbabwe have evolved through different historical epochs (pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial) (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006). Thus gender discourse in contemporary Zimbabwe should be situated in the appropriate historical, political and socio-economic contexts. Despite their continued subordination, several studies reveal African women's agency in all the aforementioned historical epochs with regards to their emancipation from oppression through patriarchal tendencies and gender repressive practices by the colonial state (Barnes, 1992, Schmidt, 1991, Jeater, 2000 & Goebel, 1997). In other words, African women have not always passively accepted their subordinate position in society.

Historically, polygyny was acknowledged and sometimes even regarded as an ideal institution of marriage in certain Sub-Saharan African societies prior to the advent of colonialism and the spread of Christianity by missionaries. However, in contemporary African societies, many people, particularly women, tend to shun the polygynous marriage practice as they perceive it as a marital institution that perpetuates gender inequalities, hence they have embraced Western cultural ideals and Christian values which may contradict such African traditional practices (Zeitzen 2008:156). In this regard, Goody (1973:175) comments that as a form of marriage, polygyny was considered to be morally wrong by Christian missionaries. Karanja (1987:253) adds that well-educated Christianised African elites in Sub-Saharan Africa usually regard polygyny as shameful and may even label it 'backward', yet, some continue the practice of multiple sexual partners in the form of 'outside wives'. Traditionally, polygyny was a symbol of status for men, who acquired more wives because of their productivity, especially in agriculture (Fenske 2011:2). Delius and Glaser (2004:85) further argue that polygyny, though fairly common, was a marital practice engaged in by a minority in pre-colonial society because few men could afford it. Moreover, polygyny did not preclude extra-marital sexual practices (Longmore in Delius & Glaser, 2004). Delius and Glaser (2004:104) strongly argue that polygyny had never been designed to enhance fidelity in pre-colonial societies and extra-marital relationships were as 'traditional' as polygyny itself. Another contributing factor to the emergence of polygyny had to do with stereotypical perceptions of male sexuality. In a patriarchal society, as is the case with many African societies, including the Shona society in Zimbabwe, men with many sexual conquests tend to be admired for their supposed virility. For example, the study by Zeitzen (2008:61) conducted in East African Mandinka society reveals that the possession of several wives is seen as an expression of male virility. In this regard the claim with regard to men's supposed virility can be viewed as one of the stereotypical perceptions about masculinity and femininity informed by a patriarchal ideology. Such perceptions tend to permeate contemporary Zimbabwean society, culminating in more subtle practices such as the *small house* relationship where implicit double standards for men and women are demonstrated.

Although the *small house* is quite a recent phenomenon, similar but different forms existed in Zimbabwe and neighbouring countries over the years. It would seem that the notion of labour migrancy was a contributing factor to the emergence of 'outside wives.' For instance, second urban wives became common in South Africa during the apartheid era when black families were not allowed to settle in urban areas (Hayase & Llaw 2007:295). Similarly, Hattori, Braun,

Chapman, Chung, Wagely and Morales (2008:10) observe that the patterns of migrant labour in Zimbabwe had a tremendous influence on the institution of marriage where men engaged in multiple concurrent sexual partnerships at their workplace. Barnes (1992) and Schmidt (1991) observe that the establishment of a pervasive system of migrant labour played a central role in destabilising family life and created a conducive environment for extra-marital affairs. However, Delius and Glaser (2004:95) have argued that the removal of large numbers of sexually active young men from communities initially diminished the potential for extra-marital relationships. One can still argue that over time labour migrancy created a shortage of sexually active young men in rural communities while creating a surplus of these in urban centres where a number of sexual liaisons developed. Thus, the notion of extra-marital liaisons has a long history in Southern African societies.

1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The occurrence of the *small house* phenomenon in contemporary Shona society has specific implications for the existing marriage and family systems in the Shona culture. Studies by Chingandu (2008), Hungwe (2012) and Mushinga (2015) show that the *small house* phenomenon is on the increase; especially in urban settings in Zimbabwe. The proliferation of the *small house* phenomenon reflects the endurance of patriarchal practices through changing times. Since the *small house* relationship tends to be unsanctioned by the Shona culture, it is treated with some degree of secrecy by the parties involved. One important aspect to add is that the *small house* relationship is characterised by non-resident fathers; a practice which may result in disengaged fatherhood and complicates the gender and intergenerational dynamics in this context. Disengaged fatherhood in turn leads to female-headed households which tend to be characterised by a lack of both financial capital and socialisation of children being dependent on one parent (Moghadam 2005:2; Van der Vliet 1984:1-2). Problems experienced in *small house* households tend to be exacerbated by the entrenched patriarchal hegemony in the Shona culture which associates masculinity and femininity with domination and dependence respectively (Chingandu, 2008). Thus the emerging *small house* phenomenon and seeming proliferation create a disjunction which warrants an investigation. It is against this backdrop that the study explores the social and gender dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon in the contemporary Shona society.

1.4.1 Research Questions

The main research question for this study is: *What are the perceptions on gender dynamics of the small house phenomenon as an emerging family structure in contemporary Zimbabwean society?* The following subsidiary questions are asked to expound on this:

How have gender dynamics evolved through different historical epochs and socio-economic dispensations in Zimbabwe?

Is the *small house* phenomenon based on patriarchal traditions associated with polygyny in Shona society?

What challenges and benefits are experienced in the *small house* household?

How do gender dynamics in *small house* households influence social exchanges between partners and the nature of the relationship?

What are the implications of absent fatherhood in *small house* households for the child's socialisation and schooling?

1.4.2 Research Objectives

The study seeks to address the following objectives:

To explore the history of gender dynamics through different epochs and economic dispensations in Zimbabwe,

To establish whether the *small house* phenomenon is mediated by the patriarchal traditions of polygyny in Shona society.

To explore the challenges and benefits which are likely to be experienced by partners in the *small house* relationship.

To establish how gender dynamics in *small house* families influence the social exchanges and the nature of the relationship.

To ascertain the implications of absent fatherhood in *small house* households on the child's socialisation and schooling.

1.5 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

The study explores a knowledge gap in the study of gender and emerging family structures in Zimbabwe. In doing so, it adds practical and theoretical value to the study of Sociology of the family.

1.5.1 The Knowledge Gap

A number of studies have been carried out in Zimbabwe on the different Shona marriage systems, including *barika* (polygyny) (Gelfand 1973; Chavhunduka 1979; Bourdillon 1998; Masasire 1996; Tatira 2010; Chirozva, Mubaya & Mukamuri 2006). However, the *small house* relationship is an emerging familial structure in contemporary Shona society and hence only a few studies were focused on the associated social and gender dynamics. Consequently, the study of Shona marriage and family systems becomes incomplete and incomprehensive without grounded knowledge on the proliferating *small house* relationship and familial structure in contemporary Shona society. The family is often regarded as the basic unit of society (Chirozva, Mubaya & Mukamuri, 2006 & Bourdillon, 1998); hence an understanding of the characterisation of the *small house* relationship becomes critical for policy formulation and planning for society's sustainable development in general and for the welfare and schooling of children growing up in *small house* households. In this regard, information on the *small house* phenomenon will feed into social policies on poverty in female-headed households, on gender-based violence and on children's fundamental rights. The last-mentioned include parental involvement in the welfare, socialisation and schooling of children growing up in *small house* households.

1.5.2 Practical Value

According to Zimstat (2013:15), the 2012 census results show that women constitute 52% of the total Zimbabwean population. Of this distribution, 26.3% are in the age range 15–49 years, which is the fertile age group. Further analysis of the data on the population distribution by age and sex for Harare (the area under study) shows that there are 71 940 more women than men; of these women 52.2% are in the age range 15–49. The Zimbabwean Demographic Health Survey conducted between 2010 and 2011 reveals that the majority (89%) of married women are in monogamous marriages, while 11% are in polygynous marriages. However, because of the secretive nature of the *small house* relationship it is argued that the demographic data do not capture these. The age group with the highest proportion of married men is 50–54 years

(91%), while that for females is the 35–39 years age group. The differences in the patterns for women and men can be largely explained by different ages at marriage and differences in longevity. The different percentages of married women compared to married men within specific age categories occur because women tend to have partners who are older than them and because women tend to live longer than men. The data on age, sex and marital status reveal that there is a surplus of women available for marriage, leading to women competing for a husband. However, it is also important to note that some women and men may opt to remain single for various reasons. All the same, some end up in polygynous or *small house* relationships. Central to this study is an exploration of the perceptions on gender dynamics, challenges and gains as well as other experiences of the *small house* partners and their children.

1.5.3 Theoretical Value

The study will contribute to disciplines such as Sociology and Anthropology of families, as well as an understanding of the relationship between family background and children's schooling experiences by interrogating the *small house* phenomenon, thereby creating a more comprehensive understanding of this emerging family structure in contemporary Zimbabwe. It seeks to explore the extent to which the *small house* household structure upholds the reciprocal mutual social exchanges between the partners. It will also bring attention to the asymmetrical relations of economic and social power between men and women within marriage institutions as a result of patriarchal ideologies and mechanisms. More importantly, the study explores gendered dynamics in the social exchanges involved in intimate relationships hence African feminism is used to illuminate the gendered social exchanges in these relationships. Thus this study propounds that: For women, social exchanges involve bargaining with men to resist unequal social exchanges in marital relationships. In other words, an understanding of the circumstances of partners and their children (where applicable) in the *small house* families will make it possible to come up with intervention measures for dealing with possible violation of their rights. The study explores legal reforms that protect partners and children in lifelong partnerships, outside marriages including *small house* relationships. Such legal reforms are discussed in greater detail in chapter two and chapter seven which explores the violation of a number of child rights in the context of informal sexual relationships like the *small house*. Lastly, the study provides a platform for further research in emerging and evolving family structures in contemporary African societies.

1.6 APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF THE *SMALL HOUSE* PHENOMENON

This section explores social exchange theory and African feminism, and qualitative approach, as the theoretical orientation and methodological approach to this study respectively.

1.6.1 Theoretical Approach

In order to have a holistic understanding of the *small house* phenomenon, the study adopts the social exchange theory and African feminism in analysing the social and gender dynamics in the *small house* relationship. Social exchange theory is one of the most influential conceptual theories that can be applied to illuminate different marital relationships (although there are competing newer theories as outlined in Chapter 3). The most fundamental social exchange principle is that humans in social situations choose behaviours that maximise their likelihood of meeting self-interests in those situations (Homans 1961:12-13). By implication the theory posits reciprocal interdependence, which emphasises contingent interpersonal transactions whereby human interactions tend to be motivated by the desire to gain ‘rewards’ and avoid ‘costs’. Social exchange theory operates on the assumption that individuals are generally rational and engage in calculations of challenges and benefits in social exchanges (Homans 1961:317). In this regard, the married man may weigh the risks and financial costs involved in supporting a ‘second partner’ against the benefits from such a relationship.

Although couples in *small house* relationships perceive reciprocal social exchanges in their relationships, it is argued that such social exchanges are gendered because men tend to dictate the pace and nature of the relationship because of their patriarchal orientation, and in this study, mediated by the Shona cultural imperatives. African feminism is thus applied to explore asymmetrical relations in *small house* relationships. From an African feminist perspective, women’s agency and dynamism should not be undermined as they have the power to mediate the trajectory of conjugal and other intimate relationships (Kolawole, 1997 & Amadiume, 1987). However, many a time the *small house* woman (especially those from a poor socio-economic standing) tends to occupy a subordinate position in the sexual relationship because she anticipates material support and social security from her partner. Thus, women’s economic situation in a relationship compromises their power in bargaining for social exchanges. In his study, Nyoni (2008:43) used social exchange theory to analyse gender and power relationships in terms of the couples’ social interactions. The study illustrates that women trade sexual favours for men’s affection and money. The combination of African feminism and social

exchange theory helps us to understand such complex reciprocal relationships and hence the two theories are used to illuminate women's agency and gender dynamics in *small house* relationships.

Since gender is first and foremost a socio-cultural construct, it cannot be understood outside history and culture. This justifies why there are several strands of African feminism because African cultures, customs and traditions that oppress women are not the same (Kolawole, 1997). This calls for an understanding of the cultural context of polygynous marital relationships in the Shona society as they relate to the emerging *small house* relationships. More so, the historical era and the context of the *small house* phenomenon become critical because social dynamics in every economic dispensation can influence social interaction patterns in given marital and sexual relationships. The complexities of gender dynamics in *small house* relationships render it difficult to discern and construct simplistic generalisations; hence, the application of African feminism with its multiple foci on the situations and conditions of women becomes unavoidable.

The situation of African women in the contemporary Zimbabwean society can be best understood through African feminist lenses in the context of different historical epochs. This study thus applies African feminism to illuminate the gender discourse on *small house* relationships among the Shona people of Zimbabwe. I must point out that my preference for African feminism does not necessarily mean that Western feminism is totally irrelevant to the African gender discourse. It actually provides a basis for African feminism to fight injustices perpetuated by men in society because of stereotyped hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy (Oyěwùmí, 2004:2). African feminism only becomes more appropriate as it centres on the context of the oppressed African woman. The gender dynamics in contemporary Zimbabwe can thus be understood through the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial historical epochs. The conceptualisation of African feminism is complex as it tends to take diverse and often multiple trajectories. In other words, the African feminist discourse and political practice is neither monolithic nor homogenous in its analysis of gender relations in African societies. Thus combining social exchange theory and African feminism will assist in understanding social exchanges and gender dynamics in *small house* relationships.

Another social exchange theory assumption is that individuals are goal oriented in a freely competitive system (Blau 1964:154). While some men may contemplate having a *small house*,

not all of them can afford to have one. This brings in the issues of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities (discussed in detail in the next Chapter) where hegemonic masculinity dominates both other men and women. As in any competitive situation, power in social exchanges lies with those individuals who possess greater resources which provide an advantage in the social exchange (Blau 1964:156). It can therefore be argued that it is those men who are financially stable who are most likely to engage in *small house* relationships.

1.6.2 Methodological Approach

The study employed a qualitative research design to guide the process of collecting, presenting and analysing data on the *small house* phenomenon. Qualitative research is often informed by the interpretivist paradigm. As a research paradigm, interpretivism allows an in-depth exploration of the experiences, attitudes, feelings and perceptions of the research participants on a given phenomenon (Neuman 2014:84). In this regard, the study adopted qualitative data collecting methods in the form of in-depth interviews to explore the experiences of *small house* partners in different residential suburbs in the Harare metropolitan province. In-depth interviews allowed for the creation of a holistic picture of the social and gender dynamics in *small house* relationships. Denzin and Lincoln (in Gall, Gall & Borg 2007:31) and Patton (2007) elaborate on this, stating that qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret the phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Similarly, Lefland and Lefland (in Schutt 2009:315) and Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:228) observe that in-depth interviewing is a qualitative method which involves open-ended, relatively unstructured questions in which the interviewer seeks in-depth information on the interviewees' feelings, experiences and perceptions of a given social phenomenon on their own terms and in the context of their situation.

The study adopted a purposive sampling technique to reach men and women in *small house* relationships as research participants. In some instances, I combined snowball sampling with purposive sampling to locate men and women in these relationships (information-rich sites). The delicacy and secretive nature of the *small house* relationship made it very difficult to access research participants, hence the need for snowball sampling at times. Snowball sampling involves identifying participants who may in turn identify other research participants with characteristics that are of interest to the researcher (Cohen et al, 2007). Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which participants are selected for a specific purpose, usually because of their unique position, experience and knowledge (Baxter & Jack 2008:9;

Cohen et al 2007:114). Patton (2007:181) adds that the thrust of purposive sampling is to identify information-rich sites. By implication, I selected partners in *small house* relationships because of their direct experiences of such relationships. In doing so, I was able to obtain first-hand information on the background to the development of the *small house* relationships, the gender dynamics as well as the challenges and benefits experienced in such sexual relationships. An interpretive analysis model was employed to assist in establishing emerging patterns or themes from the collected data.

I obtained ethical clearance for this study from the UNISA Ethics Committee, the guidelines of which steered the conduct of this study (see Addendum 1).

1.7 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Chapter 2 starts by discussing key concepts for the study and these include; sexuality in Africa, patriarchy, masculinity and femininity followed by a detailed history of gender dynamics in Zimbabwe. The Chapter also analyses the different marriage systems recognised under the marriage laws in Zimbabwe. It proceeds by reviewing related literature on the practice of polygyny, the economics of polygyny in Shona society, polygyny as a contested terrain as well as evolving and transforming polygynous marital relationships. It also reviews the traditional Shona marriage systems and the gender inequalities that are present in such marital structures. The Chapter also explores the impact of migrant labour on marriages and families. Other issues which are of relevance to an understanding of the *small house* phenomenon include absent fatherhood and the reverence of motherhood in Shona society. The Chapter clearly reveals that the *small house* phenomenon is a relatively new phenomenon with very little extant research on the topic and this thus warrants serious investigation.

Chapter 3 explores the theoretical approach to this study. Thus, the principles of social exchange theory are described in detail focusing on social exchanges and alternative relationships, social exchanges in traditional Shona polygynous relationships, sexuality and social exchange, social exchange and marital power, as well as social exchanges and social structures. Although the Chapter discusses the social exchange theory in detail, it also discusses other theories of intimate relationships such as the theory of reciprocal attraction, attachment theory and commitment theory. A criticism for the social exchange theory is also provided. This Chapter also demonstrates how African feminism is applied to illuminate women's agency and the gender dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon in

contemporary Shona society. African feminism, as a movement by women of African origin tends to emphasise the unique historical, cultural, social, political as well as the economic conditions of the African woman (Kolawole, 2002 & Oyěwùmí, 2004). African feminism thus illuminates the specificities and subtleties of the Shona women's agency and challenges in *small house* relationships.

The methodology used in this study is described in Chapter 4. This Chapter starts by conceptualising the qualitative research approach. It unfolds by describing the methodological orientation, the research design as well as the research paradigm. The purposive sampling method, snowball sampling, and in-depth interviews are described and justifications for choosing these methods are also articulated. The Chapter describes how data were collected, the challenges encountered during fieldwork and how they were handled. It also describes data presentation procedures. The Chapter closes by looking at how issues of validity and reliability in relation to the data were handled as well as the research ethics observed during fieldwork.

Chapter 5 focuses on data presentation and an analysis on the *small house* relationship and it addresses the following research questions: **Is the *small house* phenomenon based on patriarchal traditions associated with polygyny in Shona society? How do gender dynamics in *small house* households influence social exchanges between partners and the nature of the relationship?** It also explores the possible link between polygyny and the *small house* relationship and how the economic crisis in Zimbabwe has aided the proliferation of the *small house* phenomenon. The Chapter closes by analysing the agency by female participants with regards to the *small house* relationship as a haven for their social and economic security.

Chapter 6 explores the challenges and social problems experienced in *small house* relationships. It therefore addresses the sub-research question: **What challenges and benefits are experienced in *small house* households?** It emerged that women in *small house* relationships experience more social problems and challenges than their partners. The Chapter analyses how the *small house* relationship leads to multiple concurrent sexual relationships and becomes incompatible with the contemporary socio-cultural, socio-political and socioeconomic dispensations, thereby resulting in a myriad of social problems. These social problems include overstretched financial resources, gender-based violence and increased susceptibility to HIV and AIDS among others. The Chapter ends by juxtaposing the benefits and challenges in *small house* relationships.

The impact of absent fatherhood and lone parenthood on the welfare, socialisation and provision for schooling resources for children growing up in *small house* households is explored in Chapter 7. As the discussion continues, it links with the preceding Chapters (Chapters 5 and 6), as issues raised in these Chapters have a bearing on the welfare of children growing up in such contexts. The Chapter also describes how disengaged fatherhood tends to violate children's fundamental rights, including denying them access to education. In doing so it addresses the sub-research question: **What are the implications of absent fatherhood in *small house* households for the child's socialisation and schooling?**

Issues raised in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are presented as emerging themes and are analysed using social exchange theory and African feminism in order to understand gender dynamics in *small house* relationships.

Chapter 8 focuses on conclusions of the research findings, theoretical and practical contributions of the study and recommendations. It also highlights areas for further research on emerging family structures and on education in Southern African societies.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY OF GENDER DYNAMICS IN ZIMBABWE AND THE PRACTICE OF POLYGyny

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores and examines literature on the history of gender dynamics in Zimbabwe, marital practices in both traditional and contemporary Southern African societies and Zimbabwean Shona society in particular. Most importantly, polygynous marital relationships are examined in an effort to create a holistic understanding of this practice. The continuities and discontinuities of polygynous practices in contemporary Shona society are further explored as it is argued by some authors (Mutseta 2016; Mushinga 2015) that they tend to mediate the gender dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon. Since most Southern African societies are patriarchal in nature, it is imperative to examine how conceptions on patriarchy, sexuality in Africa as well as femininity and masculinity influence conjugal relationships in both polygynous and informal sexual relationships such as the *small house* phenomenon. Before exploring the history of gender dynamics in Zimbabwe and the practice of polygyny in detail, it is important to discuss key concepts related to gender dynamics.

2.2 PATRIARCHY AND MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

When analysing gender, the notion of patriarchy is critical in certain societies at certain times as it tends to mediate the nature and trajectory of marital and informal sexual relationships. Patriarchy is an important element in the study of gender dynamics in *small house* relationships as it tends to define the confines of social interaction. Asiyabola (2005) defines patriarchy as a social system of male authority which oppresses women in society and all its social, political and economic institutions. Aina (in Asiyabola 2005) adds that patriarchy is a system of social stratification and differentiation on the basis of sex, which provides material advantages to males while simultaneously placing severe constraints on the roles and activities of females. Morrell (2005) adds that patriarchy is a form of male domination based on the powerful role of the father as head of the household which can be expressed in different ways. The notion of patriarchy is a social construct; hence it assumes varied conceptualisations in different social and historical contexts and can be resisted by women in different social contexts. Despite challenges faced in conceptualising patriarchy, in this study patriarchy is taken to mean the

dominant position assumed by a man in marital or sexual relationships, such as the *small house*, where the man dictates the conditions of the relationship including issues to do with sexuality, domestic services and provision of economic resources for the household. Patriarchy thus becomes a social system in which men appropriate all important roles in society and family, and keep women in subordinate positions.

The establishment and practice of male dominance over women and children is a historic process formed by men and women, with the patriarchal family serving as a basic unit of organisation (Asiyanbola, 2005). Kambarami (2006) concurs and adds that the family as a social institution is a brewery for patriarchal practices by socialising the young to accept sexually differentiated roles. From this perspective, the Shona males are socialised to be breadwinners and heads of households whilst females are taught to be obedient and submissive to their husbands. Similarly, a study by Sathiparsad, Taylor and Dlamini (2008) in South Africa reveals that Zulu boys were socialised to see themselves, as future heads of households, breadwinners and ‘owners’ of their wives and children and females were socialised to accept male domination and control and stay faithful, loving and subservient to their male partners. Such oppressive relationships tend to have grave implications for gender equity and equality in marital relationships including informal sexual relationships. Kamarae (in Asiyanbola, 2005) further elaborates that the term patriarchy was originally used to describe the power of the father as the head of the household but now it is used to refer to the systematic organisation of male supremacy and female subordination. A patriarch is thus considered to be the head of the household and within a family; he controls productive resources, labour forces and reproductive capacities based on the notions of superiority and inferiority sanctioned by the differences in gender.

The social constructionist perspective portrays patriarchy and family as being produced by individuals in particular and in given historical contexts. Sathiparsad et al (2008:5) argue that when we look at different cultural constructs, there is no single and consistent image of patriarchy, and this renders the notion of patriarchy a relative phenomenon. For this reason Walsh and Mitchell (2006) caution against oversimplifying dominant notions of patriarchy and masculinity as being fundamentally oppressive, violent and subjugating to women as this may limit other ideas such as men being caring, sensitive and romantic. Such views may also undermine women’s agency in situations where women are dominant in households. Walsh (2001:17) views the term patriarchy as problematic since it implies a monolithic and totalising

system of oppression in which all men dominate all women, thus obscuring the differences between women as well as differences between men. Kandiyoti (1988:275) concurs and adds that the term patriarchy often evokes an overly monolithic conception of male dominance which is treated at a level of abstraction that obfuscates rather than reveals intimate inner workings of culturally and historically distinct arrangements between the genders. It can be observed that although the patriarchal ideology may be embodied and expressed in the lives of men and women, this does not mean that all men are dominant patriarchs or that all women are submissive victims (Sathiparsad et al, 2008). Moreover in South Africa, rapid political and economic transformation and urbanisation have led to the blurring of boundaries of gender roles and contributed to the uncertain and changing position of men and women (Sathiparsad et al, 2008). Although patriarchy tends to naturalise men's power, the hegemony of a dominant culture is never absolute and men and women are capable of changing the culture that define them. In other words, since patriarchy is a social construct, it means a patriarchal mentality can be deconstructed, thereby creating gender equity and equality in marital and sexual relationships. To this end, patriarchal bargains are not timeless or immutable entities, but rather susceptible to historical transformations that open up new areas of struggle and renegotiations of the relations between genders. The processes by which male dominance is constructed and maintained are complex and subtle hence patriarchal tendencies in societies may not be simplistically generalised.

Patriarchy may also imply that a gendered sexuality is mediated where women are subordinated to the extent that females may actually lose control over their sexuality. For example, in marriage, the husband can have multiple wives as well as extra-marital affairs (Kambarami, 2006). In addition, married women are expected to be sexually passive and submissive to their husbands while men are the initiators of sex and also set the conditions for sexual encounters. However, it can be argued that women bargain with men who have a patriarchal mentality within such constraints and resist male dominance (Kandiyoti, 1988). Kandiyoti also observes that literature is rife with instances of women's resistance to attempts to lower the value of their labour and more importantly, women's refusal to allow the total appropriation of their reproduction by their husbands. Thus women have the capability to bargain with men and win some space of autonomy in marital relationships.

Women's agency is further revealed in polygynous marriages where a woman is primarily responsible for her own and her children's upkeep, including meeting the costs of their

education, with varying degrees of assistance from her husband (Kandiyoti, 1988:277). From this perspective, women have very little to gain and a lot to lose by becoming totally dependent on husbands hence some resist patriarchal tendencies in marital or sexual relationships. In her study on patriarchy in Zambia, Kandiyoti (1988) reveals that men in Zambia resist the more modern ordinance marriage, as opposed to customary marriage, because it burdens them with greater obligations for their wives and children. She further observes that an informal conjugal union in which the partners may openly negotiate the exchange of sexual and domestic labour services seems to lay the groundwork for more explicit forms of bargaining. Such a practice compares quite well with the emerging *small house* relationships in Zimbabwe. Although women tend to resist male dominance, the larger picture shows that in most African societies, men tend to dominate marital or sexual relationships because of their stereotypical, patriarchal breadwinner role.

2.3 GENDERED SEXUALITIES IN AFRICA

According to Machera (2004:157) sexuality is a complex term with multifaceted meanings that include deep emotional feelings as well as issues of power and vulnerability in gendered relationships. Uchendu (2008) defines sexuality as a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, and reproduction. What is important to note here is that sexuality is socially constructed by cultural definitions and prohibitions which are relative to given socio-cultural contexts. The social construction of female sexuality becomes particularly important for understanding marital and sexual relationships in African societies including the emerging *small house* phenomenon in Zimbabwe.

The dichotomy between heterosexuality (sexual attraction between people of opposite sex) and homosexuality (sexual attraction between people of the same sex) needs to be understood in relation to the marital and sexual relationships in African cultural contexts. According to Pisani (2001:169) the belief that heterosexuality is the only natural form of sexual expression (heteronormativity) is noted in cultural frameworks that define heterosexuality as almost compulsory and homosexuality as deviant or pathological. In most African societies, Zimbabwe included, homosexuality tends to be shunned as an alternative expression of sexuality while heterosexuality is a celebrated sexual orientation. Sexuality is thus a socio-political arena constantly reshaped through cultural, economic, familial and political relations,

all of which are conditioned through prevailing social constructions of gender, race and class relationships at given points in time (Machera 2004:167). In African societies male and female sexualities tend to be constructed by the definitions of masculinity and femininity.

As already mentioned, heterosexuality is the idealised sexual expression in the Shona society in particular and African societies in general. It is through heterosexual marital relationships that African men tend to exercise their dominion over the female body. The social sanctions brought against women who are not identified as attached to men in African societies show the extent to which heterosexuality is cherished and maintained through social control (Machera 2004:166 and Bourdillon, 1997). In this regard if women remain single, they are stigmatised and ridiculed. Such practices may compel women into exploitative marital or sexual relationships with married men as is the case with *small house* relationships in Zimbabwe or polygynous marital relationships in Africa in general. The female body is thus owned, it belongs to the social entity mainly for reproductive purposes and the man has been commissioned to oversee this 'noble function' by subjecting the female to close scrutiny and suppression of their sexuality in Africa (Machera 2004:166). However, Kaler's (1998) study in Zimbabwe reveals women's agency in the use of family planning pills without the knowledge of the husbands and this signifies women's ability to control their bodies and fertility. Thus, in African (and other) societies female sexuality becomes a contested terrain.

Chastity is the norm of premarital sexuality among many social groups in Africa. Diallo (2004:174) observes that chastity in general and girls' virginity in particular is perceived as a result of a good family upbringing. Girls' virginity is a source of respectability because it proves self-mastery, maturity and decency. In the Shona culture, a mother receives an extra cow (*mombe yechimhanda*) when her daughter is found to be a virgin at marriage (Bourdillon, 1997 and Gelfand, 1979). Girls are thus taught that sex is only good in marriage, that a woman should not have sex with any other man except the husband, a wife should not deny the husband his right to sexual intercourse and most importantly, a girl should preserve her virginity and look forward to bearing children for her husband (Machera 2004:166). By implication, procreation is the celebrated function of female sexuality in Africa. While women's sexual behaviour is curtailed, men's virility is actually praised and also presented as something out of their control; it is up to women to avoid being victims of their own sexual impulses, and to use their own means to enhance their sexual capabilities (Machera, 2004 & Zeitzen, 2008). Similarly, Skodal, Campbell, Nyamukapa and Gregson (2011), observe that hegemonic notions

of 'real man' as tough, independent, physically strong, fearless and sexually unstoppable have been identified as causes for multiple concurrent sexual relationships in many African settings. Such societal perceptions show the extent to which patriarchal masculinity controls the female body through narrow versions of heterosexuality and also the extent to which African women are detached from their sexuality. In this regard sexuality itself is part of a power struggle where women remain subordinated in sexual relationships.

There are a number of cultural rites and rituals that are performed to control women's sexuality in most African societies. Nelson (in Machera, 2008) found that among the Kikuyu of Kenya, sexuality for women has more to do with procreation than with pleasure, hence female circumcision is done to control women's sexual drive and to keep them under control. In this respect, female genital mutilation (FGM) must be understood, as an expression of patriarchal dominance meant to enforce the subordination and suppression of women. It has been ascertained that the centre of female sexuality is the clitoris and that female orgasm is achieved through the stimulation of the clitoris (Masters and Johnson in Machera, 2004). Thus mutilating the clitoris through the cultural practice of FGM, the female sexual drive is reduced; hence from this perspective, such women may not indulge in extra-marital relationships. The construction of female sexuality is thus influenced by the meanings attached to the female genitalia. When female sexuality is looked at from this perspective, women in such African societies are mainly expected to please their husband sexually with disregard for their own pleasure and this practice epitomises the concept of the female as sex pot; she is used but is not allowed to have independent sexual desire or inclination (Ojo, 2010). However, in some African societies, such as some ethnic groups in Mozambique, Zambia and Tanzania practise what is variously called labia stretching or labia enlargement during initiation rituals, which is opposite of mutilation (Amadiume, 2004). The practice is meant to enhance sexual pleasure and in so doing giving women power to control their sexuality.

Sex as pleasure tends to be antithetical to fundamentalists thinking that insists on sex as sin, sex as duty, sex as marital right and sex as male domination. Amadiume (2004:3) argues that when sexuality is viewed from this perspective or from the perspective of FGM, sex would incorrectly seem mechanical and only for male gratification and female procreation for which a woman is simply a depository. Such views may reinforce the practice of male power over female sexuality which is not all about sexuality in Africa; it may not be fair to regard all women in Africa as sexually repressed, sexually inferior and sexually mutilated. Amadiume

(2004:4) further observes that customarily, in most traditional African societies girls' bodies were also heavily decorated by women themselves in their society's signs and symbols. The point here is that such an elaborate decoration and beautifying makes these girls seductively attractive (though it can still be argued that this is for the benefit of men) defying beliefs that have focused on African women's sexual inferiority. Many African traditional cultures seem to simultaneously teach sexual pleasure, but practise customs that regulate women's sexuality (Amadiume 2004:6 and Gelfand, 1979). In this regard the claim that the sole purpose of such practices such as FGM is to reduce female sexual desire and ensure virginity and fidelity becomes too simplistic. In the same vein, it is also misleading to claim that the only reason for reducing the size of the vagina in the practice of FGM is to increase the men's sexual pleasure. However, the larger picture of this practice is that genital mutilation is a brutal and painful act, with at best agonising repercussions and at worst tragic consequences and yet because of deeply entrenched masculine ideological connotations, it is still practised (Onyango in Uchendu, 2008:66). Diallo (2004:181) concurs and adds that societies which condone FGM have been perceived as oppressing women's sexuality and violating their rights to sexual pleasure but on the contrary the cultural context in many of these practising societies acknowledges individual sexual pleasure as a vital part of human life, for men as well as for women. This perception is quite contrary to the claim that FGM ensures that female sexuality exists only through men, and is part of the agenda of serving the patriarchal interests of female oppression. By implication the sexual rituals performed by women in different African societies may be perceived as revealing women's agency by making the female genitalia a contested terrain for power dynamics in sexual relationships.

Male sexual virility in African societies may be expressed through several sexual relationships such as traditional polygynous marital relationships or informal sexual relationships. In this regard Diallo (2004:182) observes that a man may have more than one sexual partner through the system of polygynous marriage, in which a husband's pleasure and gratification are at the centre of women's sexuality. Onyango (in Uchendu, 2008:61) points out that the male genitalia have been portrayed as a symbol of domination in Kenya where a man's sexual virility is celebrated. Onyango further elaborates that a man who engages in multiple sexual relationships is seen as a worthwhile bull or cock, while a woman who engages in multiple sex relationships is seen as a prostitute. In general, wives' sexuality is based on the values and practices that aim primarily at satisfying their spouse's needs, hence the notion of 'marital rape' is 'unheard of' in many African cultural contexts. However, it can still be argued that beyond this apparent

inequality in sexual relations among couples, marriage provides women with a respectful context and means for sexual fulfilment where married women have the rights to request and enjoy sexual intercourse in perfect harmony with customary dictates.

Although homosexuality is sometimes cast as antithetical to African cultural sexual orientation, its existence dates back to time immemorial. According to Tamale (2013:35) historical and anthropological studies show that same sex African partnerships existed long before foreigners set foot on the African continent. Epprecht (1998:63) also reveals that sexual intimate relations between males can be attested in Zimbabwe, notably in one explicit Bushman painting and also in oral traditions about custom rules and punishment. Epprecht further elaborates that expressions of male to male sexuality that were known in the first decades of colonial rule included affectionate, reciprocal love affairs, prostitution, rape and sexual assault while the victim slept. However, homosexual behaviours among black Zimbabweans remained secretive and unmentionable until the late 1980s. The association of Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) was established in 1990 and other solidarity local groups emerged with a thrust for enlightening the Zimbabweans on the nature of homosexual orientation and humanity of people so inclined (McFadden, 2002 and Epprecht 1998). To show the extent to which homosexuality is despised in certain sectors in Africa, the Ugandan government has condemned male homosexuality as a capital offense for repeat offenders (Epprecht, 2008). To this end, Tamale (2013:33) elaborates that antidemocratic upsurge on the African continent involves the repression of homosexuals. The truth of the matter is that homosexual relationships are a reality in African societies but such relationships have remained secretive as they have never been socially sanctioned by these societies.

Despite all these developments discussed in the preceding paragraph, many people in contemporary Zimbabwe still maintain that homosexual behaviour is 'un-African'; a foreign 'disease' that was introduced by white settlers and that it is now principally spread by foreign tourists and ambassadors (Epprecht, 1998:632). The social construction of indigenous homosexuality appears to have more complex expressions and subtle manifestations as those who are in homosexual relations may also maintain heterosexual marital or sexual relationships. With girls in most African societies, the customary obligation to submit to male desire was so strong that a girl who refused could in the eyes of the community be kidnapped or 'eloped' usually with the connivance of family members (Bourdillon, 1997 & Gelfand, 1979). In the contemporary Zimbabwean society, gays and lesbians who have 'come out' still

continue to have heterosexual marital relationships; have families and appear 'normal' (McFadden, 2005). Similarly a study by Epprecht (2008) in Lesotho has revealed that the effective and erotic bonds sometimes formed between indigenous women in Lesotho (which often continue alongside heterosexual marriage) neither replace nor challenge overtly the high value placed on heterosexual marriage and reproduction in Sesotho culture. Such a practice reveals the high value placed on heterosexual relationships in African cultures despite the fact that some members of society may have a homosexual orientation. Epprecht (1998:635) reiterates that although homosexuality is a reality in Zimbabwe, it remains secretive and socially unsanctioned by the Zimbabwean society. Mugabe, the former head of the Zimbabwean state, characterised homosexuality as a threat to an idealised patriarchal culture and national values, explicitly linked to cultural imperialism (a practice where a dominant nation imposes its cultural values and beliefs on the local people) (Epprecht 1998:644). By and large marital relationships in Zimbabwean society remain heterosexual, though heterosexual marriages or sexual relationships remain a contested terrain as the expressions of patriarchal masculinity remain deeply entrenched. The small *house* phenomenon in Zimbabwe becomes yet another heterosexual relationship where men express their sexual virility by having several sexual relationships. Homosexuality is therefore perceived as a threat to the ideals of the heteronormative Zimbabwean society.

2.4 UNDERSTANDING MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY IN AFRICA

Masculinities are configurations of practices structured by gender relations that are inherently social, historical and contextual; and depict the domination of men and subordination of women in society (Schippers, 2007 & Connell, 2001). Thus masculinity, similar to patriarchy, tends to be shaped by culture and is expressed differently at different times and in different circumstances and places by individuals and groups. This therefore argues for diversity in masculinities which should be recognised because different social, cultural and racial milieus can construct different forms of gendered behaviour. Connell (2001:38) asserts that men present themselves in everyday situations in structural factors which are independent in human social relations in four conceptions of masculinities which include subordinate, complicit, marginal and hegemonic masculinities. Of interest to this study is the social construction of masculinity (and femininity) in the Shona culture of Zimbabwe and how the phenomena mediate gender dynamics in marital or even informal sexual relationships like the *small house* phenomenon.

Hegemonic masculinity tends to have great influence on gender dynamics in marital relationships or even on interactions between men themselves. Connell (2001:38-39) views hegemonic masculinity as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which is taken to guarantee the dominant position of men and subordinate position of women. Hegemonic masculinity can thus be conceptualised as dominant, aggressive, superior and violent tendencies associated with perceptions of being a man. This differs significantly with other masculinities that are not hegemonic. Connell (1997) observes that gender hegemony operates not just through the subordination of femininity to hegemonic masculinity but also through the subordination and marginalisation of other masculinities. However in his study in South Africa, Morrell (2001) concludes that it is difficult to say which masculinity is dominant in society given the diversity of cultures, race, class, ethnicity and histories that men in Africa share. In this regard Morrell argues that in a transitional society, as is the case with South Africa, the question of which discourse is hegemonic becomes a complex one as men respond differently in changing situations; some are defensive, some accommodating or responsive. Generally, gendered power relations in society may influence the different notions of masculinity.

As already alluded, masculinity is a relative phenomenon which influences gendered power relations in intimate relationships differently. In the context of Shona culture a 'real man' is seen as possessing many cattle, having many wives, and children, one who holds position of influence in society (Bourdillon 1997 and Gelfand 1979). In this regard Connell (1997:191) presupposes that masculinity is a product of social construction that is forever being constructed in every context. Uchendu's (2008) study of the Zulu people in KwaZulu- Natal, South Africa reveals how Zulu men were expected to be responsible with regards to sex:

Penetrative sexual encounters of any kind before marriage were unmasculine acts. It was inappropriate behaviour to prove one's masculinity through sexual conquest. A Zulu masculine subject must not deflower a girl: when he did, it brought public shame as well as severe repercussions to him and his family (Uchendu 2008:8).

The preferred masculinity by the Zulu combined marital prowess with honesty, high morality, loyalty, aggression, endurance and absence of emotions (Uchenda, 2008:8). This implies that masculinity as a social construct is not only a form of identity that influences and shapes

attitudes and behaviours but also an ideology that represents the cultural ideals that indicate the expected roles and values that men must adhere to (Leach, 1994). As a result of hegemonic masculinity, men use control, authority, strength and being competitive and aggressive to demonstrate power both among themselves and between men and women. A 'real man' in the Shona culture must be able to sire children and when his wife fails to conceive, he either marries another woman or engages in extramarital affairs to prove his potency and hence his manhood (Kambarami, 2006 & Gelfand, 1979). However, masculinity as a product of social construction can be deconstructed and reconstructed in changing circumstances and contexts. Perceptions on hegemonic masculinities can thus influence gendered power relations in marital relations among the Shona people.

The other notions of masculinities which include subordinated, complicit and marginal masculinities are perceived as non-hegemonic because they often display non-violent characteristics (Schippers, 2007 and Connell, 1997:78). Morrell (2001) concurs and adds that there are notions of masculinity which are hegemonic and others that are non-hegemonic. By implication, power relations among men themselves produce subordinated masculinities. Connell (2005) observes that the most common example of subordinate masculinity in contemporary society is that of homosexual men as they are seen to fail to live up to the 'ideal' of hegemonic masculinity and are subjected to name calling such as 'sissies'. This also applies to the Zimbabwean context where homosexuality is perceived as an anathema and men who engage in such relationships have been castigated and labelled animals (McFadden, 2005). Schippers (2007) elaborates that heterosexual men express hostility towards homosexual men thereby enhancing their own heterosexual identity; heterosexuality thus becomes an important ingredient of the hegemonic masculinity and by doing so, heterosexual men proclaim their membership to the dominant masculinity. It can thus be argued that masculinity and sexuality tend to overlap with each other in gendered power dynamics producing subordinate masculinities which serve as the inferior 'other' as well as a constrained subordinate position of the woman.

As already mentioned, complicit masculinity is another notion of non-hegemonic masculinity. It can be observed that masculinities constructed in ways that realise the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops are known as complicit (Connell, 2001:40-41 & Schippers, 2007). In this regard, some men may be seen supporting equal employment opportunities, but the mere fact that they benefitted from an economic system that

favours men over women, are complicit to the status quo. Many men who draw the patriarchal dividend also respect their wives and mothers; they are never violent to the women and bring home the family wage (Connell, 2005 & Schippers, 2007). Thus the social construction of complicit masculinities may result in relatively balanced power relations between men and women in households although men may still benefit disproportionately in the public domain for simply being men (patriarchal dividend). Lastly marginalised masculinities involve men who are marginalised because of class, ethnicity as well as race (Connell, 2001). However, it can be observed that in society and households, even those men who are marginalised tend to dominate women in marital relationships.

Masculinity and femininity are relational concepts that tend to structure and constrain each other in an evolving way as they influence gender dynamics in marital relationships. The definition of masculinity thus influences the notion of femininity in any given context. Femininity entails attributes that are perceived as womanly and these include obedience, caring, compassionate, loving and non-violent (Kambarami, 2006). To illustrate the symbiotic relationship between masculinity and femininity, Schippers defines hegemonic masculinity as it relates to femininity:

Hegemonic masculinity is the qualities defined as manly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic femininity and that by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordinate position of women. (Schippers, 2007:94).

She also gives a definition for hegemonic femininity which portrays similar implications for the woman:

Hegemonic femininity consists of characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordinate position of women (Schippers, 2007:94).

Connell (1997) concurs and elaborates that all forms of femininity in any given society are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men. Thus femininity is defined around compliance with this subordination and is oriented to accommodating the

interests and desires of men. In other words, female sexuality tends to be influenced by the definition of femininity and such a definition has a bearing on the nature of marital relationships in any given socio-cultural context.

2.5 THE HISTORY OF GENDER DYNAMICS IN ZIMBABWE

To understand contemporary gender dynamics in Zimbabwe, it is important to explore the historical development of gender dynamics in different socio-political and socio-economic contexts. Gender dynamics in familial and sexual relations tend to be largely mediated by gender dynamics at macro level; that is in political and economic spheres. Two decades following Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, Zimbabwe's gendered social and political transformation tended to be characterised by a swinging pendulum of state-led progress on women's issues followed by a period of retraction on earlier commitments (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:49 & Mama, 2001:16). Such trends have endured into the 21st century as gender inequalities remain conspicuous in almost all spheres. The state's commitment to women's challenges has always been ambivalent and the gender ideologies remained as the state failed to fulfil the expectations of women who supported the liberation struggle. Such patriarchal orientations, coupled with the state's shallow commitment to improve the lives of Zimbabwean women help to explain the state's lacklustre gender transformation, particularly in areas of economic empowerment and legal reforms. The state continued instituting legal reforms and gender policies (as reflected in the 2013 constitution) into the 21st century but its ambivalent stance remained. Consequently, the state has reinforced the colonial government's gender-biased policies that oppressed and marginalised women. Women's weak legal, political and economic standing has a bearing on their marital or sexual relationships like the emerging *small house* phenomenon in contemporary Zimbabwe.

2.5.1 Gender Dynamics in Colonial Zimbabwe

The structures of women's subordination in both the domestic and social spheres tend to be negotiated, disputed and transformed over time. Schmidt (1986:1) observes that the household remains a terrain of struggle, manifest in disputes over the allocation of labour, control over female reproduction and distribution of resources. The subordinate status of African women in colonial Zimbabwe was not solely a result of European impositions, but rather indigenous and European structures of patriarchal control reinforced and transformed one another into new

structures and forms of male domination (Schmidt 1986 & Barnes, 1991). In other words, women's subordinate position in society was further exacerbated by the combination of traditional patriarchy and colonialism.

As the white settlers initiated a new economic dispensation, the Southern Rhodesian's (colonial Zimbabwe) economy changed from being cattle-based to cash-based, introducing a number of taxes to be paid by the indigenous families. In order to meet tax obligations and buy European trade goods, many African households expanded their acreage under cultivation and sold their surplus crops to Europeans (Schmidt 1986:2 & Barnes, 1992). African women as the primary agricultural producers, played a major role in household response to market opportunities and ultimately in the emergence of an African peasantry. It appears that during this time women were economically more active than their male counterparts as they devised more lucrative means of acquiring income. Schmidt observes that it was customary for women to brew millet beer which was either provided to neighbours in exchange for labour at critical points in the season or sold at mine compounds. Mine wages were so low and beer brewing so profitable that women selling beer to the mines frequently earned more money than the miners themselves (Schmidt 1986). However, by 1909 such enterprising women had come under virulent attack from the Goromonzi native commissioner because their creative approach to acquire household needs discouraged rendering labour to the settler capital (Schmidt 1986:4). Thus given the central role of female labour in agricultural production, women can be described as the key agents of African peasant prosperity in the early years of the twentieth century.

The tax economy forced men to join the labour market while women and girls remained in the rural areas engaging in subsistence work. Barnes (1992:594) observes that as the colonial state increased the pace of land alienation and favoured settlers over African producers in the 1920s, staying afloat must have been a difficult process for African families. Consequently, as Schmidt (1986) observes, it was not only through their labour that women and girls enhanced the material well-being of their household, but also the receipt of their bridewealth (*roora*) with its large cattle component that bolstered the household needs (in this study I use the terms *roora*, *lobolo* or *lobola* to mean bridewealth depending on the context). Payment of *roora* gave a man control over his wife's reproductive capacity and to any children she might bear (Shope, 2006 & Schmidt, 1986). Barnes (1992:594) concurs and adds that under such difficult circumstances, there remained one traditional source of wealth that fathers could count on; bridewealth payments from the marriages of their daughters. To this end, one rural official in the 1930s

remarked that fathers had come to regard these payments- once only a symbolic exchange of gifts between families- as a fair means of accumulating cash to pay taxes and meet other financial obligations (Barnes, 1992:594). As discussed in detail later in this Chapter, this change represented the commodification of a woman's value to her family. It is not surprising that the cattle and cash components of *roora* payments were rapidly rising. In this context, an African woman's residence in town, with its potential for engaging in "all abomination and destruction," was likely to lower the bridewealth her relatives could demand from potential suitors (Barnes, 1992:594).

It is also observed that during this time prosperous men were able to acquire more wives and have more children to work in the fields. However, wives in such circumstances were little more than farm labourers working for food and accommodation. Schmidt (1986) observed that there was intensified, pressure on women at a time when alternative ways were also emerging; so women in such marital relationships often ran away to urban centres and mine compounds. She observes that as legal minors without access to land and wage employment, women whose domestic situations had become intolerable needed to find new male partners and protectors. A large number of young women who ran away were married to much older men, invariably polygynist, to whom they had been pledged at childhood (Barnes, 1992 & Schmidt, 1991). Schmidt (1986) elaborates that quite often the young wives had not freely consented to those marriages, but instead had been pushed into them by their families, who were anxious to consolidate important social bonds and to acquire bridewealth. England (1982:12) concurs and adds that junior wives at polygynous households were often assigned the most arduous and tedious agricultural tasks, supplying the bulk of farm labour, hence they often ran away to towns. Such resistance by women reflects their agency and their willingness to live independent and autonomous lives.

2.5.2 Gendered Spaces and Women's Agency in Colonial Zimbabwe

As women ran away from oppressive husbands and pledged marital practices in rural areas, they were not welcome to the urban centres. A study by Schmidt (1991) on patriarchy and capitalism reveals that the Southern Rhodesian state made a clear alliance with African patriarchy to control African women's mobility (Barnes, 1992:588 & Jeater, 2000). The attitude towards urban women reveals the extent to which urban spaces were gendered by both white settlers and Africans. African men and white settlers in colonial Zimbabwe did not want

women in urban areas for different reasons, informed by patriarchal hegemonic practices and colonial, capitalist tendencies respectively.

Although the colonial state had its own hidden motives; it seemed quite determined to assist African men to constrain the behaviour of ‘their’ women. With reference to the proposed act of 1933 one chief native commissioner in colonial Zimbabwe stated, “We are endeavouring to assist the kraal natives to control their women”. However, it was apparent that legal reforms were primarily for the benefit of the colonial settlers. Such labour laws were meant to entice African men into the labour force by reassuring them that the woman at their rural home remained under their control and at the same time the legislation also aimed to structure the cheap reproduction of the African labour force (Barnes 1992:589).

The alliance between the African men in colonial Zimbabwe and the settler capital had deeply entrenched contradictions and conflicts of interest. Ranger (in Barnes, 1992:602) reveals that in Makoni district in the eastern region of Manicaland, by the 1930s peasants were well aware that their interests and those of the state were in many ways incompatible; yet male peasants simultaneously supported an alliance with the state against African women. What was important for African men was that ‘their’ women remained subordinate and subservient to them. Moreover, struggles over proceeds of women’s mobility had thus become more important than the simple restriction of mobility itself (Barnes, 1992:603). African men seemed to be in a dilemma here, rural households seemed to have benefited from women’s sale of domestic and sexual services to men in town; thus restriction of women’s freedom of movement could logically be expected to also restrict the earnings that could be shared by relatives. Lastly, trapped in its own logic, the colonial state had no grounds to refuse a woman a pass even if she was travelling to town to engage in prostitution if she could prove that she had her guardian’s permission to leave home. On the whole, in as much as there were such contradictions and conflicts of interest, the alliance between the African patriarchies and settler capital worked to the detriment of the African woman. From a settler capital perspective, economically dependent women would continue to subsidise male wages through subsistence production in rural areas. Thus the ideological basis for the domestication of African women masked the broader economic objectives of settler capital and the state.

From the 1920s, the colonial state began to define urban African women as a ‘problem’ preferring them to be based in rural areas (Jeater, 2000:30; Barnes, 1992 & Barnes, 1997). The

white settlers did not want women and families in urban areas so as to cut costs on domestic labour and social reproduction. Attempts by African women in 1950s Salisbury (Harare today) to assert themselves as urban people, facing urban problems of housing and transport were met with hostility and sexual assault from male residents (Barnes, 1997 & Jeater, 2000:30). Apparently the white settlers in Southern Rhodesia preferred men as workers; hence the concept of jobs became gendered founded in urban spaces. This gender bias in employment has been linked to the complex issue of the 'rural subsidy'; that is the complementary role played by subsistence farming in rural areas which supplement low wage incomes offered by the white settlers. It can also be observed that the gender bias in employment was more a product of African gender relations than of white preference for male workers (Jeater, 2000:32). Jeater further elaborates that the preponderance of male workers in the town was arguably, not initially the result of settler preference but of reluctance by rural households to release their female members. African women were expected to continue farming the land so that it could not be confiscated.

There was no place for African women in urban areas because they were not employed by the settlers and so were removed from access to rooms provided by them. White settlers thus deliberately constructed hostels or flats that would accommodate men only and enacted laws that would bar female residents in such flats (Barnes, 1997; Jeater, 2000 and Benson & Chadya 2003). As already mentioned, African men connived with settler capital in defining the urban space as a no-go area for African women. Married women were expected to remain behind if their husbands sought waged work in towns, in order to maintain rights to land (Jeater, 2000:38 Benson & Chadya 2003). Thus African men as well as the settler capital regarded town as a man's place rather than a woman's place.

One of the main ways in which gender relations are constructed and patrolled in Shona communities is through control of physical spaces where there are specific men's places such as the *dare* (council) and specific women's places such as the kitchens and birthing huts (Bourdillon, 1997 and Jeater 2000:40). Thus for the Shona it becomes shameful to cross the boundaries into an inappropriate space. In this regard, women who strayed in towns were perceived as deviant and regarded as prostitutes. Such women did not live in ways that gave them a proper recognised cultural and social identity. Thus women did not have a 'place' in town in which their identity could be asserted. A study by Jeater (2000) on women in Southern Rhodesia reveals that one local African husband stated categorically during a court case that

the fact that his wife wanted to stay in town was proof that she must be a prostitute. This implies that in African perceptions, it was 'normal' for an African man to be in town, but African women were seen to be 'out of place'. Furthermore Schmidt (1991:733) espouses that as a result of state policy, African women and children were forced to stay behind in rural reserves undertaking subsistence cultivation to feed themselves and subsidise the men's wages. Throughout most of the colonial period, the wages paid, housing provided, and rations issued to African men were based on employers' assumptions about what a single man needed to survive, it was assumed that families left behind could fend for themselves and possibly even supplement the worker's food.

To curb mobility for Africans, the colonial settlers in Southern Rhodesia enacted segregative pass laws. The colonial political economy was concerned first with restricting movement from "native" spaces to "white" spaces and second to keep track people as they did move around the colony (Barnes, 1992:586). The first pass laws were applied to African men in Southern Rhodesia almost immediately after the establishment of the colonial order in 1890 and its first successful defence against African revolt in 1896-1897 (Barnes 1992: 587). Thus segregation in colonial Zimbabwe was based on racial and gender lines and in these circumstances, women came worse off because first, they were Africans and second, they were women.

Barnes (1997) observed that the primary use of pass laws in relation to African women in colonial Zimbabwe was a rather half-hearted regulation of rural-urban migration. One of the pieces of influx control legislation in Southern Rhodesia, ordinance 16 of 1901 provided for only African males to be registered and issued passes stating "No native, not being a married woman whose husband is in employment in the township, shall remain within the limits on any township to which this ordinance applies" without a pass or registration certificate. The ordinance made African women's legal presence in towns contingent upon having a husband "in employment" in the township and on being able to prove it. Benson and Chadya (2003: 108) concur and add that state policy between the 1890s and 1940s restricted African women to rural areas, both to pacify the African patriarchies whose migrant labour was required for the farms, mines and industries of the ruling White minority and so that African women would reproduce the labour force at little or no cost to the white economy.

Since identification certificates were only issued to men, they served to officially differentiate African men from African women (Barnes, 1997 & Schmidt, 1986). By implication pass laws served as markers of gender difference and became one mechanism for social construction of

gender in colonial Zimbabwe. Thus the primary interface between African women and the pass laws lay on the urban terrain; the forbidden space for women (Jeater, 2000 & Barnes 1997). Although women were not required to carry identification certificates, they were subjected to a range of measures designed to ensure their confinement in the rural areas and exclusion from urban areas. Barnes (1992) reveals that mobile women were to be prosecuted for conveying infection. In this regard, women's exercise of mobility, sexuality, and cash-earning ability were being clearly described as a crime against the state and hence African women were struggling to allocate their labour as they saw fit. Jeater (2000:41) further elaborates that gender control over spaces had to be renegotiated and reinvented and the end result of such a process was that women were denied any legitimate place in the public urban environment.

These practices persevered into post-colonial Zimbabwe and this time the target was on single women who were deemed prostitutes. Ranchod-Nilsson (2006:61) espouses that in 1983 the new Zimbabwean government carried out 'operation clean-up' in major urban areas to get rid of the so-called prostitutes and vagrants. Jeater (2000:41) concurs and adds that by the 1980s, the belief that women, especially single women could not have a legitimate place in urban public spaces had become deeply rooted in Zimbabwean gender constructions as evidenced by the notorious 'round ups' of single women from the town streets. Thus towns were appropriated by men as one of the women-excluding 'gendered spaces' which provide an organising principle in the construction of gender relationships in African societies (Jeater, 2000:41). Thus the colonial Zimbabwean society was highly hierarchical and men enjoyed positions of power from the home into the wider society.

Schmidt (1991:734) elaborates that African women's subordinate position in present day Zimbabwe is simply the result of colonial land and labour policies and of British intervention in the African social order. However, it will be misleading to blame women's subordination entirely on colonialism, African women's subordination is not solely the result of policies imposed by foreign capital and the colonial state, rather indigenous and British structures of patriarchal control reinforced and transformed one another, evolving into new structures and forms of domination (Ranger, 1983). African women's historical, political and economic background has a bearing on bargaining power with men; hence they remain subordinated in marital relationships as well as in society.

In Southern Rhodesia, unattached and mobile African women in towns were suspected of being disreputable and diseased. Thus African women were inscribed into colonial space as "stray

women” who were responsible for “spreading disease all over the country” and were deemed evil vessels of contamination (Barnes, 1992:589 & Jackson, 2002:191). As a result, African women were expected to be yonder, in the reserves set aside for the reproduction of African male labour power. Furthermore, because single African women were suspected of spreading venereal diseases, they were subjected to compulsory venereal disease examinations upon entry into towns. Jackson (2002:191) espouses that the compulsory venereal disease examinations imposed on single African women who travelled to urban and industrial spaces in Southern Rhodesia are an example of how gender violence and violation of women’s rights were formalised as an official state policy. These examinations were known as *chibeura* in local Shona language which means to open by force; women were forced to open their legs for examination. In other words the fact that African women were subjected to these examinations when they travelled to towns speaks volumes to the distinct ways in which they mapped in the political, economic and socio-spatial order of Southern Rhodesia.

Prostitution seemed to have become widespread in colonial Zimbabwe since in circumstances of dire need it became a source of livelihood for some rural households. Lamenting on the proliferation of prostitution in urban centres and mines, the native commissioner of Goromonzi stated:

I have more trouble over this immoral state of affairs than almost any native commissioner in the country. The Mashonas in this district are prostitutes almost to the last woman, either professional or occasional. A large number, when they want money, go out and earn it at once. They are encouraged to do so by all their relatives as long as they always go home again (Barnes, 1992:596).

Not all African men in colonial Zimbabwe were against women’s migration to urban areas. Similarly in colonial Nairobi (White, 1990) not all groups of mobile women were acting against the wishes of their guardians; and by the end of the decade ending in 1936, there were women who were supplementing rural finances through sex work. To this end, even men in rural areas supported women’s mobility (Barnes, 1992:597). As alluded earlier on, women’s mobility and the distribution of its proceeds became even more important to African families in the difficulties of the 1930s due to the country’s transition into tax economy. Allegations of increasing levels of prostitution abounded and a native commissioner in Southern Rhodesia remarked that “the wholesale manner in which the women are throwing aside all their old habits of decency and flocking to the industrial areas is perfectly appalling” (Barnes, 1992:601). Barnes further notes that other officials alleged that rural families had begun to rely on the

proceeds of urban prostitution as many a time women were purportedly sent to get the money to pay the taxes during the tax period.

These circumstances of African women in colonial Zimbabwe are similar to the situation of African women in colonial Kenya. A study by White (1990) in colonial Nairobi reveals that prostitution was neither an immoral nor temporary practice for women arriving in cities, instead, it represented a rational economic choice made first by families and later by women escaping from rural patriarchal social formations to available opportunities in the cities. She maintains that women should be viewed as Nairobi's urban pioneers since they settled permanently in towns before men and used money accumulated from the sale of domestic and sexual services to buy property. White presents prostitution, not primarily as an act of desperation, but rather as either a rational economic means of accumulation or method of arresting economic decline in the rural household. She shows how many rural fathers in drought and disease-ridden areas used their daughters' money obtained from prostitution to replenish livestock. In some cases however, women went to Nairobi and began to accumulate money for themselves and establish independent households. The study by White (1990) thus reveals certain African women's social agency and demonstrates the complexity of social formations at work in a large African city beyond state regulation. Rather than viewing women solely as victims of an oppressive regime, or competing patriarchies, White concludes that prostitutes were pillars of the urban African community, both in providing reproductive services for the male labour force and property owners in Nairobi. It can thus be argued that such women had more bargaining power in intimate relationships and thus mediate the conditions of their relationships.

2.5.3 The Reinvented Customary Tradition

The lack of sanctioned accommodation for African women fortified the jural minor status of African women, which was being codified in Southern Rhodesian constructions of "native customary law" (Ranger, 1983; Barnes, 1992 & Jackson, 2002). Advocating the retention of laws that condemned African women to perpetual minority status, one native commissioner stressed that African women should remain under the firm control of their fathers, guardians or husbands for the duration of their lives as this was in accordance with African customary law (Schmidt, 1991:738). The settler capital had always wanted to hide behind a façade of African customs which they had actually invented to suit their circumstances. A study by Moore (2015:815) in South Africa, also reveals that with the threat of industrialisation and

urbanisation, the patriarchal alliance of African men and the state used “customary law” as a vehicle to refashion rural tradition and bring African women under control. In this regard, Martin Chanock (in Barnes, 1992:589) in his work on colonial Zimbabwe and Malawi remarked: “It is clear that the intervention by the state in these matters involve the manipulation, if not the manufacture of “tradition” in a swiftly changing social and economic environment”. In this regard Ranger (1983:250) further espouses that the most far reaching inventions of tradition in colonial Africa took place when the Europeans believed themselves to be representing age-old African customs. Ranger further elaborates that what were called customary law, customary land rights, and customary political structure and so on were in fact all invented by colonial codification. To this effect, Elizabeth Colson aptly describes the evolution of customary land law:

The newly created system was described as resting on tradition and presumably derived its legitimacy from immemorial custom. The degree to which it was a reflection of the contemporary situation and the joint creation of colonial officials and African leaders was unlikely to be recognised (Ranger, 1983: 250).

In other words, the invented traditions tended to conceal new skewed balances of power. However, the point is not merely that the invented custom concealed new balances of power and wealth, since this was precisely what custom in the past had always been able to do, but these particular constructs of customary law became codified and rigid and unable so readily to reflect change in the future (Ranger, 1983:250-251).

Men tended to appeal to ‘tradition’ in order to ensure that the increasing role which women played in production in the rural areas did not result in any diminution of male control over women as economic assets. Moreover, colonial officials reasoned that African women could be best controlled through economic means: as long as women were totally dependent upon their husbands’ access to land and cash income, their behaviour could be kept in line (Schmidt 1991:738-739). The colonial reification of rural custom produced circumstances for African women that were very much at variance with the pre-colonial situation. The pre-colonial movement of men and ideas was replaced by the colonial custom-bound microcosmic local society.

Like the settler capital, African men hid behind the justification of custom and tradition to perpetuate women’s marginalisation and subordination. Paulme describes two images of oppressed African women:

The first was the practical breakdown under colonialism of many customary institutions regulating the relations between the sexes; a breakdown almost always disadvantageous economically to women, and the second was the constant appeal by men to tradition. Men asserted their dominance over a changing economic and social system by their complaints of the breach of tradition by women (Ranger in Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983:257).

As discussed in preceding sections, African men collaborated with their oppressors; the colonial settlers to constrain African women's agency and resistance. To this end Ifeka Moller elaborates:

Colonial records on African 'tradition', on which the new invented custom was based, were exclusively derived from male informants, so that indigenous female beliefs remained unrecorded. Thus men's dominance in society, which is their control over religious beliefs and political organisation, was expressed even more clearly in colonial invented custom than it had ever been before. Moreover, African men were prepared to appeal to the colonial authority to enforce 'custom' upon women once it had been defined (Ranger, in Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983: 258).

Thus African women's concerns were deliberately excluded in the invented custom. The colonial state tried to coerce women into staying with their husbands through a variety of mechanisms which it attempted to legitimise by referring to "native custom" (Schmidt, 1991:750) While African custom had been both flexible and sensitive to extenuating circumstances, "customary law" now written in stone was not. In divorce, under African custom occasionally mothers would be given custody of children if the father was seen incapable of supporting children (Schmidt: 1991:751). However, the reinvented customary law had no provisions for such flexibility, as most decisions were bent on suppressing the autonomy of African women.

2.5.4 The Migrant Labour System and Extra-Marital Affairs

Another issue of concern with regards to extra marital affairs was the migratory labour system. The migratory labour system imposed by the settler capital created opportunities for extramarital affairs as men spend long periods at their work places either at mines, urban areas or farms. To this end, the native commissioner for Mtoko wrote: "Adultery is becoming more and more frequent among natives and in almost all cases the women concerned are wives of absentees at work" (Schmidt, 1991:740). Rather than attributing the increase in adultery to the migratory labour system's disruption of family and marriage, the official asserted that the

problem lay in the fact that too few men were going to work. As a result of the proliferation of marital discord, men sought assistance from the colonial settlers to impose punitive measures on women who engaged in extramarital affairs. As a result, in 1916 the state tried to respond to the complaints by African men by instituting the Native Adultery Ordinance (Barnes, 1992:591). Adultery in rural African communities was linked to economic conditions through the expanding migrant labour system. Ranger (1983:258) concurs and adds that in Southern Rhodesia, and elsewhere in the zone of industrial labour migration, officials imposed punishments for adultery and enforced paternal control over marriage in response to constant complaints by male 'traditionalists'. Barnes (1992:592) further espouses that while colonial officials felt that the new adultery law would be greatly appreciated by the African men of the colony, they defended it ardently as it would admirably serve their own economic interests. They reasoned that many native men were deterred from leaving their homes to seek employment out of fear that their wives will engage in extramarital affairs during their absence. When looked at in this way, the adultery law benefitted both the African patriarchs and the colonial settlers and African women emerged as the the losers.

The expanding migrant labour system allowed more foreign men from neighbouring countries like Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique to travel through the Southern Rhodesian colony. Like their indigenous counterparts, the migrant labourers from neighbouring countries wanted women to provide them with domestic and sexual services. Barnes (1992:591) elaborates that for the migrant workers to obtain the services of these women, they were willing to make payments directly to an individual woman (rather than bridewealth payment to her male relatives). Here we see competition for women's labour between indigenous men and migrant workers. To this end, Barnes (1992:592) observes that in a changing economic climate, this new competition for female labour seems to have favoured foreigners, and some married women became migrant labourers in their own right by leaving rural areas and family control to earn money in mine compounds and towns. Due to such competition, many disputes arose over women in this early period of colonisation. A study by Barnes (1992) in colonial Zimbabwe reveals that in 1911 and 1912, approximately 52% of the civil cases brought in the Mtoko court were claims for compensation by husbands against other men who had allegedly committed adultery with their wives. Barnes also reveals that in the 1910 to 1919 period, approximately 90% of the civil cases were domestic disputes involving women – adultery, divorce, return or payment of lobola or seduction charges. Such statistics reveal the extent to which urbanisation had affected the social organisation of the traditional African society and

its moral fibre as familial and marital structures failed to constrain the extraordinary behaviour of women and men in society.

Clearly migrancy was one of the contributing factors to the emergence of multiple concurrent partnerships in colonial African states, as men migrated in search of employment in urban areas and mines (Hattori et al 2010:8). Labour migrancy separated husbands and wives, creating opportunities for either of them to engage in extramarital affairs. Hattori et al go on to explain that as men settled at their workplaces, far away from their families, they tended to engage in extramarital affairs resulting in some cases in the establishment of parallel families. Similarly, Nelson Mandela, the late former president of South Africa, speaking at a Fathers' Day lunch hosted by his daughter, condemned the migrant labour system saying, "One of the most shameful parts of South Africa's apartheid history is in how black family life was ruined by separating fathers from their families" (Townsend 2013:190). It is, however, important to note that the types of extramarital affairs took different forms in Zimbabwe and surrounding countries.

Barnes (1992) and Schmidt (1991) observe that the establishment of a pervasive system of migrant labour played a central role in destabilising family life and created a conducive environment for extra-marital affairs. However, Delius and Glaser (2004) have argued that the removal of large numbers of sexually active young men from communities initially diminished the potential for extra-marital relationships. It can thus be argued that labour migrancy created a shortage of sexually active young men in the rural communities while concomitantly creating a surplus of them in urban set-ups where a number of sexual liaisons developed.

In recent times in Zimbabwe, the notion of migrant labour persisted and was so conspicuous during the period 2000–2009 that it is now referred to as the decade of economic plunge and political crisis. According to Sadomba (2011), Zimbabwe's unplanned Fast Track Land Reform (FTLR) had ripple effects leading to economic collapse and political crisis that pushed Zimbabweans across borders and all over the world looking for employment. In concurrence, Bloch (2010:233) observes that the number of Zimbabweans in the diaspora increased gradually in the 1990s, accelerating rapidly after Zimbabwe's economic decline shifted drastically to economic and political crises and this had a tremendous bearing on the marriage institution and family organisation. In support, Mazuru (2014:130) observes that the period 2000–2009 saw a massive exodus of Zimbabweans into the diaspora, notably South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and the United Kingdom. She further elaborates that this was the era when

Zimbabwe experienced the highest number of emigrants in history and, to this day, most of them are still in the diaspora. It is of great importance to observe that, unlike in the past, the Zimbabwean emigrants to the diaspora during this time included both men and women. However, either way the diaspora phenomenon created an environment that was conducive to multiple concurrent sexual relationships; that is, both husbands who leave their wives for greener pastures and those who are left by their wives for the same reasons have opportunities to engage in concurrent sexual relationships (including the *small house*).

2.5.5 African Women's Agency and Resistance

The discrimination of African women did not go unchallenged, women showed a lot of agency as they resisted the oppression brought by a combination of traditional patriarchal tendencies and the ideals of colonialism. Countless women reacted to their hardship in the rural areas by running away to the emerging towns trespassing into the forbidden enclaves (Barnes, 1997; Schmidt 1986 & Schmidt, 1991). African women vehemently resisted the Southern Rhodesian state policies and imposed themselves into the forbidden enclaves and gendered urban spaces as Jackson aptly explains:

The condition of African women in the colonial public sphere throughout most of the colonial period was thus akin to that of what Gayatri Spivak calls the “unaccommodated female body” which while “displaced from the empire/nation negotiation”, ultimately contests that displacement by imposing itself bodily upon the space, by reinscribing space with itself (Jackson, 2002:192).

This reflects African women's resilience against patriarchal domination and oppressive colonial restrictions. African women's agency is further demonstrated during the colonial period in Zimbabwe as they became the first to make the municipal locations their permanent homes and the study by Jackson (2002), for example, reveals that at the break of the First World War, African women owned 106 of the 115 rented stands in Bulawayo (Makokoba) location. The same scenario prevailed in colonial Nairobi where women became the first permanent residents of Nairobi (White 1990). Thus women's resilience is fully reflected in both the Rhodesian and Nairobi cases.

In the course of the 1920s, it also became clear that housing was another crucial variable in urban female class formation in Southern Rhodesia. As such in the urban locations, a shortage of accommodation and women's small economic means often forced single women to lodge

with male workers, either as single women or in a group (Barnes, 1992:598). Schmidt (1986) concurs and adds that as women arrived in town, they would most likely form an informal, often temporary liaison or series of liaisons with male workers, providing him with domestic and sexual services in exchange for shelter (Schmidt 1986). This gave rise to a form of domestic labour sales known in vernacular as *mapoto*, a term that may be translated as “cooking pot marriage” (Barnes, 1992:598). Barnes further elaborates that a *mapoto* union was a gender relationship free of the ties and obligations of marriage, in which bridewealth was not paid to the woman’s relatives. In doing so, they maneuvered the colonial legal system and imposed themselves into the forbidden urban space. Women’s agency in these forbidden spaces should not be undermined. Barnes (1992:598) observes that there was a group of female property owners in the Bulawayo location in the years up to 1930 who built and owned their own houses. She further elaborates that although some may have rented rooms to prostitutes, they were regarded as respectable women, and their access to housing precipitated the development of a nascent female petty bourgeoisie.

Furthermore, Barnes (1997) observes that during the colonial era, African women contributed to the shaping of urban society not so much by confronting patriarchy head on, but rather by persisting in performing tasks that accorded them space in urban areas. Here Barnes attempts to show that African women not only fought against the patriarchal domination of their husbands and fathers, but also fought with their men against the colonial settlers. This is demonstrated in her analysis of the issues raised by African women in the demands of strikers in the 1940s. She writes:

The workers’ understanding of how the prevailing economic system affected their families contributed to their willing to strike. Lists of workers’ demands show that they were increasingly concerned about issues of family viability and social reproduction (Barnes 1997:446).

When the role of women is added to this matrix, it becomes clearer that African strikers in Southern Rhodesia in the 1940s were not just demanding economic enhancement. They wanted their employers to take responsibility of the burden of their social reproduction and that of their families. With pressure from African women, the colonial settlers later on gave in to women’s demands though with some conditions that were less stringent than before. Similarly, the African patriarchal systems as well as the laws enacted by the settler capital were resisted by

African women who sought independence in urban spaces. In demonstrating women's agency, Schmidt wrote:

The refusal of women to marry their appointed partners, their persistence in entering into adulterous liaisons, and their flight to missions, mines, farms and urban areas posed a serious threat to African male authority and, consequently, to the entire system of indirect rule (Schmidt, 1991:741).

During this period some African women could decide to discontinue a marital union that they deemed oppressive. One irate native commissioner expressed his dismay on the behaviour of African women:

For some time now, and in recent years in particular, I have noticed that the women assume a very arrogant, independent and indifferent attitude towards their husbands and exception to any genuine remonstrance which he may make and this is often pounced upon as an excuse for deserting him (Schmidt, 1991: 744-745).

Some women who ran away from their husbands did so as a result of physical abuse and oppressive tendencies by their spouses. Wives also ran away because their husbands married other women, were sterile, provided them with insufficient food or clothing, refused to work for their families, or spent too much time and money on beer (Schmidt, 1991:745 & Goebel, 2007). Women were therefore being proactive and utilising opportunities that were emerging in urban areas. The resistance by African women to both patriarchal practices and colonial discriminatory tendencies were described as becoming defiant and obstinate. Thus African women's agency is further enunciated by one native commissioner:

The native women of the present generation are, as a matter of fact, asserting their rights under our law to quite an extraordinary extent. They claim ownership of cattle and goods purchased with money they have earned which has been given to them, the right to select their husbands, and applications for divorce are far more common amongst women than men (Barnes, 1992:594).

Such sentiments tend to defy the oversimplified and generalised perceptions of women's docility, obedience and lack of agency. Here women are seen challenging both patriarchy and colonial impositions.

African women's agency was also observed in colonial Nigeria. A study by Amadiume (1987) on the Nnobi people of Nigeria revealed that in pre-colonial Nigeria, the flexible gender system meant that male roles were open to certain categories of women through such practices as *nhanye* ('male daughters') and *igba ohu* ('female husbands'). These institutions place women in a more favourable position for the acquisition of wealth and formal political power and authority. However, under colonialism these institutions were banned. As was the case in colonial Zimbabwe, those who wielded power such as warrant chiefs, court clerks and court messengers in colonial Nigeria were all men (Amadiume, 1987:136). African women thus demanded the removal of the warrant chiefs and closure of the native courts and European firms. Amadiume clearly describes African women's resistance:

The irate African women tore down native court houses, snatched warrant chiefs caps and hurling themselves in desperation at trained troops armed with rifles and machine guns (Amadiume, 1987:140).

Although African women remained subordinated in colonial Zimbabwe, as was the case with other countries in Africa, their agency should not be overlooked as evidence in several incidences of their resistance and struggle abounds. The different African feminist strands are a manifestation of women's agency and resilience which strive to achieve women's total emancipation at both household and societal level.

2.5.6 Reviewed Gendered Relations in Colonial Zimbabwe

Gender relations in colonial times were worsened by the husbands' failure to contribute to households because of the exploitative wage employment by the settler capital (Goebel, 2007; Barnes, 1997 and Jeater, 1993). Women's circumstances were further exacerbated by the effects and struggles around both rural patriarchies and the state imposed laws and practices which tended to constrain their agency.

The decade of armed struggle (1970-1979) with its violence and social turmoil was particularly critical in shaping the terrain of post-independence gender relations in Zimbabwe. African women broke the once rigid gender divide line when they participated in the liberation struggle both as armed combatants and as rural supporters who provided local groups of guerrilla fighters with information and logistical support as well as domestic services such as cooking

and laundry (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:3; Mama, 2001:15 and Israel, Lyons and Mason, 2000:198). The presence of women as combatants led to the review of gender relations where traditional gender roles were put aside in favour of military hierarchy. Ranchod-Nilsson (2006:53) espouses that sexual relations between combatants were forbidden, and marriages were discouraged and most importantly traditional practices associated with reproduction and marriage such as *roora* were suspended and in some instances criticised as feudal practices. Although gender relations were reviewed, cases of sexual abuse and harassment remained prevalent among the female combatants (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:54). By implication, the perpetual sexual exploitation of women, highlighted their overall subordinate position and undermined the revised gender relations between and among the combatants. Nevertheless, the new gender relations became yet another way to define the liberation struggle in opposition to the prevailing patriarchal order of colonial African society.

During the armed struggle women took their grievances about domestic issues to the combatants, primarily involving conflicts with their husbands and asked for their intervention and in order to win the support of rural women the combatants intervened (Goebel, 2007 & Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:56). The domestic issues that women raised with groups of local guerrillas illuminate the gendered nature of colonial rule in Southern Rhodesia. A study by Goebel (2002) in Wedza district in Zimbabwe revealed that women in Wedza were conscious of their rights and responsibilities associated with land seniority and motherhood that had been undermined during the colonial period. Thus for African women, the armed struggle was also a struggle for their emancipation from both rural patriarchies and the state imposed laws and practices. However, gender dynamics during the decade of armed struggle remained complex. Although the guerrilla fighters were seen to be assisting women presumed harassed by men, they were also the perpetrators for gender based violence and sexual harassment. Ranchod-Nilsson (2006:57) reveals that the *chimbwidos* (girl war informants) were also responsible for a variety of domestic tasks and much to the dismay of parents lived with the combatants providing sexual services at their rural bases. Even so, when the war ended, it was clear that African women had made significant contributions to the armed struggle. The issue here is that the absence of a strong commitment by the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) (the major party fighting white settlers) to transform gender relations or circumstances of women makes it difficult for women to realise total emancipation (Israel et al, 2000 & Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:54). However, the presence of armed women combatants passed a challenge to

the patriarchal authority of African men. After independence, the new state struggled to chart a course of policy and practice; they had no clear agenda for gendered social transformation.

2.6 GENDERED SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN POST-COLONIAL ZIMBABWE

The early years of independent Zimbabwe were characterised by several legal reforms to improve the circumstances of women as promised during the armed struggle. Thus African women's participation in the armed struggle, early government efforts to improve access to education and health-care, and the passage of multiple pieces of legislation after independence to strengthen women's legal position vis-a-vis majority status, property rights and access to employment all suggested a society undergoing a profound transformation in gender relations that would improve the lives of Zimbabwean women (Mama, 2001:16, Israel et al, 2000 & Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:50). More so, Ranchod-Nilsson (2006:54) further espouses that at the first ZANU women's seminar in Mozambique towards the end of the war in 1979, ZANU leader Robert Mugabe, praised women for their participation in the armed struggle and said that the war had become "as much a process towards the liberation of the nation as toward the emancipation of women." Parpart (1995:6) concurs and adds that when independence was finally won in 1980, the new government publicly recognised women's crucial role in the liberation struggle, calling for new laws and programmes to ensure that women reaped the benefits of independence. However, the new government was never genuine in their efforts to improve the circumstances of women as under the surface of such high profile changes were developments involving the fate of women combatants who were then labelled prostitutes and vagrants. More recently, efforts to change women's situation has faded as the gender dimensions of socio-political transformation in Zimbabwe have been affected by the current economic crises.

Women do not seem to have fared well in the social and political transformation that characterised the shift from colonialism to independence in most societies in Sub-Saharan Africa. Ranchod-Nilsson (2006:51) observed that the long history of women's involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa combined with industrialisation, urbanisation and related influences of the organisation of the work and family has meant that the post-apartheid government has faced gender-specific demands from specific groups of women who refused to subsume questions of gender subordination under appeals to national unity. However, even in such cases gender equality remained unevenly realised in practice. This affirms that the

legacies of the liberation war for gendered social transformation were not only ambiguous, but profoundly contradictory (Mama, 2001 & Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:52). The new government of Zimbabwe was seen as renegading on the promises it made to women during the armed struggle.

Women in the military camps expressed their resentment about social practices associated with and implications of *roora* and expected changes in what had become the repressive practices associated with *roora*. ZANU's pronouncement towards the end of the war seemed to support these expectations and raised the hopes of African women (Mama, 2001 & Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:52). When women looked at the period before the armed struggle, they described their husbands as oppressors; a number of women spoke of their mothers selling handmade pots to earn money, which they could spend as they saw fit (Goebel 1997 & Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:58). However, prior to the war, these women were not allowed to sell pots because their husbands knew that by selling pots their wives would have money of their own and that implied that they would be economically independent of men. So after the war, African women longed for the return to the era where they could exercise autonomy. It is clear here that the economic standing of a woman or even a man has a bearing on gender dynamics in the household.

Zimbabwe's independence occurred in the middle of the UN's decade for women and the new government was under pressure to signal its support for the women's rights agenda. Initially the new government seemed to be determined to improve the status of women; and this saw the creation of a new ministry which included a department of women's affairs, the passage of legal reforms that benefit women, educational reforms that led to increased female enrolment and new initiatives to improve health-care all suggested that the lives of both rural and urban women were improving (Mama, 2001:16 and Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:59). However, as time progressed, the Zimbabwean government tended to shift goal posts and reverted to old patriarchal tendencies. Ranchod-Nilsson (2006:59) observes that two decades later, the department of women affairs had completely become marginalised, the legal reforms that benefited women, particularly the Legal Age of Majority Act (LAMA) 1982, were under attack and women were left to bear the burdens of increased rural impoverishment, the failure of the educational reforms and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. More so, during the 1990s the deleterious impact of structural adjustment packages on all, but the elite in the capitalist periphery, exacerbated the feminisation of poverty to such an extent that the gendered nature of global economy that benefit women strategies and their consequences could no longer be denied

(Mama, 2001). By implication, in Zimbabwe the new government has played a contradictory game of gender politics and has never been fully committed to the empowerment of women agenda.

As mentioned, in the early years of independence, a number of legal reforms were made:

- the Maintenance Act was amended to ensure financial support for deserted and divorced wives and children;
- LAMA (1982) which granted all Zimbabweans both male and female, full majority at the age of 18 (this legislation gave women full jural rights, something they had not had in either colonial or pre-colonial Zimbabwe);
- Matrimonial causes Act (1985) gave women rights to property in marriage and changed the practice of automatically giving fathers custody of children in divorce cases;
- the Sex Disqualification Removal Act (1985) which declared that women with pre-requisite qualifications could not be barred from holding the same offices and positions as men;
- the Deceased Person's Family Maintenance Act was amended in order to protect spouses, especially widows, from property grabbing relatives; and,
- the Labour Relations Act (1985) provided that women would receive paid maternity leave and time at work to nurse their children (Parpart, 1995:6; Chirisa, 2013:9 & Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006).

These sweeping legal reforms promised gains for women in the areas of employment, marriage, inheritance, child custody and divorce where the colonial codification of African customary law had disadvantaged women (Dube, 2014 & Chirisa, 2013). It should be born in mind that under customary law only men can inherit and all family members are subordinate to the male head of the family. In this regard, a woman's status becomes basically the same as that of a junior male in family. In most traditional African societies customary law has long directed the way African people conducted their lives as guided by patriarchal tendencies, hence by referring to the old traditions and customs, men are perpetuating gender inequalities in the family and society.

Despite all these efforts to craft legal reforms, women's emancipation remains far from being realised. Parpart (1995:7) observes that at macro level, it would appear that the legal and

government structures set in place to help Zimbabwean women, have not achieved as much as one would have hoped. In fact, women's needs have either been neglected or indirectly excluded in many spheres of state policy, including resettlement programmes (Goebel, 2005:146 & Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:60). In this regard, Goebel (2005:146) elaborates that the contradictions between customary law, practices and attitudes, and modern individual rights represents complex battle grounds for land and women in Southern Africa and calls for new feminist conceptualisations of the state as a vehicle for gender justice. To make matters worse, the legal reforms were controversial; by conferring legal majority status on women at the age of 18, LAMA gave women the right to vote, to own property, to contract marriage without parental or family consent, to become guardians of their own children and to initiate civil litigation (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:62; Goebel, 2005 and Barnes, 1997). The provisions of LAMA contradicted customary law in a number of ways and was thus seen as corrupting and 'unAfrican'. Parpart (1995:8) concurs and adds that laws and institutions designed to improve women's status have had to contend with deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs in the Zimbabwean society. Although patriarchal practices existed in the pre-colonial Zimbabwean society, they became more robust during the colonial period through invented customs and traditions (Ranger, 1983). It is clear however, that the language and attitudes supporting male superiority and female subordination continue to dominate much Zimbabwean discourse and practice and have undermined the progressive legislation mentioned above. In concurrence, Maboreke (1987) observes that most decisions concerning women's lives are made at household and community level, where customary law dominates, and because customary mores for the most part defined and controlled by men, it can often be manipulated to protect male interests. The new, mainly male, government thus hid behind a facade of tradition and the need to preserve culture, and in doing so, they maintained the traditional gender inequalities.

The department of women's affairs was never capacitated to address women's issues. At best the continuous shifting of the department of women's affairs indicates a lack of a coherent vision of women's issues within the state and at worst it indicates a lack of genuine interest in addressing issues that affect women and even an intent to use women's issues to gain support for an increasingly authoritarian state (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:64). Women's situation seems to have been worsened by lack of representation in decision making posts. On the whole, after two decades of independence, the Zimbabwean government had not only abandoned its advocacy of women's issues, but had in many ways become an obstacle to improvement in women's lives and even a cause of increased hardship (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:66).

Historically, women have had to fight a two pronged battle for their emancipation; oppression mediated by the state and patriarchal tendencies perpetuated by their husbands and fathers. Such circumstances have endured into the 21st century and contribute to women's subordination in contemporary Zimbabwe.

2.6.1 Women and the Labour Market in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe

The labour market remained heavily gendered as women tended to occupy peripheral and less influential positions in independent Zimbabwe, despite robust gender policies and sound legal reforms that have been instituted to protect the interests of women. At independence, most African women worked in the rural areas as unwaged family workers on small holdings or communal areas, receiving little reward for their work and in that context men controlled the sale of produce and thus the little money that came into the household (UNDP, 1994). A study by Parpart (1995) reveals that in 1986, only two government ministers (6.25 %) were women; no women held provincial governorships; women constituted 8% of the deputy ministers, 9% of the Members of Parliament and 1.82% of the local councillors. By 1992, 12% of parliament seats were held by women (UNDP, 1994:145). Moreover, women are conspicuously absent from the highest levels of government. Parpart (1995) reveals that in 1985, the politburo (the ruling party's top decision making body) had only one woman out of the 15 members. Considering the fact that women constitute 52% of the Zimbabwean population, these figures are clearly far from being representative. In this context, women's fate is decided by men (though women tend to resist) who dominate in most of the decision-making positions.

Men have historically dominated waged employment in Zimbabwe and this trend has continued into the 21st century. However, since independence women have increasingly entered the waged labour force. In this regard, Parpart (1995) has observed that in 1980, the first post-independence year, African women in Zimbabwe held 1.9% of the jobs in production, 2.5% in agriculture, animal husbandry and forestry, 7.2 % in service, 8.5% in clerical and related employment and 16.6 % in professional and technical jobs. Furthermore, only 3-4% of employees in public administration were women and by 1986 only 14 out of 1400 agricultural extension workers were women and this made it difficult for female farmers to receive training (Parpart, 1995:8). Parpart further observed that women classified as skilled workers were concentrated in the clerical and service occupations, such as medical assistants, nurses, midwives, teachers, social workers, typists and telephonists. Jacobs and Howard (1987) add

that African women worked in the lowest paid and least secure sectors of waged employment. It would seem the new government retained the colonial legacy and the patriarchal hegemony to perpetuate women's subordination in the labour market (see discussion below, section 2.6.3.4, on the recent gender division amongst political leaders).

Although by 1992 women comprised 48% of the waged labour, they remained clustered in the least skilled, worst paid and most insecure jobs (Parpart, 1995:8). A study by UNDP (1994) further reveals that 71% of employed women worked in agricultural jobs, while 8% work in industry and 21% in services. It has been also noted that women in industry experienced sexual harassment, lack of promotion, limited training opportunities and little support from administration (Parpart, 1995:8 & Ranchod-Nilsson, 1992). A study by UNDP (1994) further reveals that only 41% of the Zimbabwean population had waged jobs and that many people, particularly women, are left struggling to survive in the informal sector, which has become increasingly competitive and unrewarding in the current economic crisis (women's circumstances in the informal sector are discussed in detail later in the Chapter).

Kimmel (2004) makes an analogy of the glass ceiling to demonstrate challenges faced by women with regards to promotion in the labour market; he explains that women who enter into an all men's field bump into the glass ceiling, signifying the limit on how far they can rise in an organisation. In other words, although most of the formal barriers to women's promotion have been removed (through legal reforms), there still exist certain subtle, invisible sexist and patriarchal ideologies that prevent women from being promoted. Thus women's lack of economic opportunities can be attributed partly to the state's ambivalent attitude towards the implementation of legal reforms and partly to the deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs in the Zimbabwean society.

Patriarchal assumptions in Zimbabwe have inhibited women's ability to perform in male-dominated sectors of the economy and government. Parpart (1995:9) espouses that public statements of glorifying women's roles as mothers and wives encouraged women to stay home and raise children rather than enter the workforce or seek more training. Batezat and Mwalo (1989:26-27) add that the current economic crisis has reinforced the notion that women should stay home and leave to men (the breadwinners) the well-paying waged jobs. However, while men have benefited from economic and political development in post-colonial Zimbabwe more than women, it is important to recognise that some African women benefited from the

economic development as well; for example, by 1989 21% of academic posts at the University of Zimbabwe were held by women (Parpart, 1995:9). It can thus be concluded that patriarchal ideology, particularly concerning the sexual division of labour, has affected many women's ability to take up the opportunities available in post-colonial Zimbabwe and most importantly, legislations ostensibly designed to address women's issues have been poorly enforced and institutions that hamper women's opportunities have been hardly challenged.

2.6.2 Marriage and Gender Relations in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe

Problems experienced in gender relations in marriages are not new to the Zimbabwean society as Schmidt (1991), Barnes (1999) and Jeater (1993) have explored gender relations in colonial times, emphasising the struggles around both traditional patriarchies and state imposed laws and practices. A study carried out by Goebel (2007) in Wedza district of Zimbabwe reveals that from the perspective of married women farmers, gender relations in the 1990s in Wedza were fraught with struggles over male infidelity, particularly with its implications for household income. As a result women spent considerable energy and time on practices such as the use of 'husband-taming' herbs (*mupfuhwira*) (Goebel, 2002). In the Shona culture there is a belief that certain herbs (*mupfuhwira*) can be used to make men docile and obedient to their wives. Such moves by African women reflect their agency in fighting domination by men in marital relationships.

Women in Wedza claimed that marital discord and collapse of marriages are on the increase and a crisis of masculinity and patriarchy may be at hand with implications for family formation, social order and survival (Goebel, 2007:228). Just as was the case during the period of labour migrancy in colonial Zimbabwe (Schmidt, 1986), husbands are reported as doing nothing to contribute to the household needs. Within this overall difficult context, we see women's agency and forbearance, the enduring, ethic of caring and the buffering effects of people's access to arable land (Goebel, 2007:228). In this study by Goebel, women report that they are doing anything to earn money such as working as maids for teachers or performing piecework in other people's fields and 'bad' women are said to engage in prostitution for money while 'good' women just work harder. These observations point to a situation where women have become providers for the economic needs for their households. Although women seem to have become providers of household needs, they remain oppressed because they lack ownership of critical resources such as land, homesteads and livestock.

In the context of racialised oppression and colonial rule and in the context where income poverty remains a gendered and racialised phenomenon, marriage enables women to improve their access to resources and social networks, while often compelling them to comply with gender conforming practices (Moore, 2015:819). Historically throughout the Southern African region, it can be seen that women gained access to critical resources such as land and livestock, primarily through marriage (Schmidt, 1986 & Bourdillon, 1997). This is an important point in relation to gender and household theory where Jackson (in Goebel, 2007) observes that it is important to focus on women's agency in order to understand the benefits of marriage from their perspective. Hence, women may continue to partake in an institution that is seemingly oppressive and exploitative to them. Such observations, allow us to identify situations where marriage no longer seems to be a good bargain for women and be seen as a source of continuing hardship. According to Goebel (2007), researchers in Botswana have noted shifts since independence in 1966 wherein women gained autonomy and status through new rights to own plots of land and homes, access to employment, and becoming relatively better educated than men. Cornwall (2002:240) also observed that in South-Western Nigeria, women tend to disengage from marriage and rather pursue their own economic and sexual agendas as men fail to deliver on their responsibilities in relation to wives and children. A respondent in a study by Goebel (2007) in Wedza district shared her sentiments towards marriage in contemporary society:

Marriage is now useless. I am suffering because my children do not have food, clothing and school fees. My husband is a useless man. I have eight children but my husband enjoys himself like a bachelor whenever he has money. He drinks a lot (Goebel, 2007:242).

By implication, because of economic hardships, men seem to have abdicated the provider role and make the situation even worse by engaging in extra-marital affairs. Mama (2001:16) posits that a feminist analysis of post-colonial states links violent and destructive manifestations of modern statecraft with the persistence of patriarchy in all its perversity. Here we find women bent on creating autonomous spaces in which to work at, and developing their own individual and collective agency; women who dare to differ and fight patriarchal domination in society.

2.6.3 Gender Relations in Contemporary Zimbabwe

Gender inequalities in Zimbabwe have endured into the 21st century unabated. The circumstances of women have been further exacerbated by the political and economic crises that saw the near total collapse of the formal industry and the emergence of the informal industry.

A study by Goebel and Dodson (2011) on female headed households in Msunduzi Municipality in South Africa is also revealing for Zimbabwe; women have less access to formal employment than men, earn less income than men and are thus less able either to save money or to secure credit or other financial services. As already mentioned, women in Southern Africa are vulnerable in the sense that their rights to property are usually obtained via marriages or cohabitation with a male partner and many women find themselves trapped in situations of domestic violence or other forms of spousal abuse for fear of losing their accommodation (Barnes, 1997, Schmidt, 1991 and Goebel & Dodson, 2011). Such circumstances, coupled with lack of representation in decision-making positions, have had grave ramifications for household provisions and marital relationships in the contemporary Zimbabwean society. The colonial legacy is revealing in clean-up campaigns in cities organised by the post-independent Zimbabwean state. Parpart (1995:9) elaborates that clean-up campaigns in the cities have organised attacks against unescorted women in public places, have blamed economic problems on these “prostitutes”, making it difficult for women to take up employment that requires travel, and inhibiting collective action and organisational activities, particularly when meetings must be held at night (more recent similar situations are discussed below).

2.6.3.1 Gender, Land Reform and the Zimbabwean State

At the turn of the 20th century, the state of Zimbabwe engaged in massive land redistribution which was influenced by a political stance of the ruling party to remain in power (Sadomba, 2011). Land redistribution in the beginning of the 21st century remained largely gendered as most women were excluded from the Fast Track Land Reform (FTLR) programme instituted in the year 2000. Goebel (2005:159) observes that the implication for women and land rights is that while the state intervention is crucial to support improved access and control of land for women, women are faced with negotiating those rights through the complex social field of formal and informal institutions, customary and general law practices and values. As a result, men become the sole beneficiaries of land redistribution further emaciating the economic standing of women in Zimbabwe.

Due to colonial legacies of the processes of land alienation, women found themselves excluded in Zimbabwe's FTLR. This was not surprising, because shortly after gaining independence, the new government had resettlement schemes set up to provide land to liberation fighters, individual land grants were awarded to men as heads of households (Parpart, 1995:8). While women's lives have been distinctly tied to the land, this relationship to the land has historically been mediated through male entitlements and control through the institution of marriage and the allocative powers of the traditional authorities (Goebel, 2005 & Bourdillon, 1997). Resettlement policy in Zimbabwe also maintained the approach to land which is commonly associated with the Shona custom which prevents married women from gaining access to land in their own right (Bourdillon, 1997 & Goebel, 2005). Consequently permits for resettlement were assigned to married couples in the husband's name only. Parpart (1995:8) elaborates that a married woman was prevented from owning land, and if she divorced (for whatever reason); she lost the right to stay on the land because it was registered in the husband's name. Because women rarely own land, and if they do, they usually obtain marginal land with little chance for capital accumulation, they are regarded as credit risks and have more difficulty obtaining loans than men (Parpart, 1995:8). Distribution of land was therefore informed by masculine and patriarchal tendencies in African societies which emphasise custody of critical resources in the hands of men. Such a form of masculinity requires women's distance from the land as 'outsiders' in patrilocal settlement, just as it requires women's distance from their children through constructing children as belonging to the patrilineage (Goebel, 2005, Bourdillon, 1997). In any case, the FTLR process in Zimbabwe was characterised by a lack of planning and violence (Sadomba, 2011); conditions which work to marginalise women as new settlers and which favoured men. It is important to note that women's land rights were not only culturally sanctioned, but also informed by a colonial legacy which treated women as minors.

2.6.3.2 African Women and the Informal Industry in Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwean economy encountered serious viability challenges at the turn of the first decade of independence. As part of its effort to resuscitate the deteriorating economy, the government adopted the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) (Sadomba, 2011), which mediated the closure of most formal industries and consequently the emergence of the informal industry as a new economic dispensation. Gender dynamics in households were thus mediated by the informal industry as a new economic dispensation dominated by women

(Mupedziswa and Gumbo, 1998 and Chirisa, 2013). Sadomba (2011) concurs and adds that the opening up of the economy from through ESAP resulted in the growth and expansion of the informal sector. ESAP impacted negatively on household income as the majority of men who worked in the formal industry were retrenched. Mutangi (2016) further elaborates that the deregulation of the labour market accompanied with massive retrenchments in both the private and public sectors meant that all the redundant labour force workers had to compete in the informal sector to make a living. ESAP thus constrained the budgets of many households ushering them to abject poverty and as custodians of the household, women were the worst affected.

Under situations of structural adjustment and economic crisis, women are particularly vulnerable to the intensification of work and responsibilities associated with attempts to compensate for diminishing resources at the household level (Mupedziswa and Gumbo, 1998:73 and Chirisa, 2013). As ESAP in Zimbabwe contributed to the transformation of the economy into an informal one, the majority of women (even married ones) became providers for most of the needs of the household through selling and trading. The agency of African women is further reflected during this period as they had become major providers of family services even though their incomes had also been eroded by ESAP. In doing so, women challenged the hegemonic masculinity ideals which tend to portray men as the sole providers of the household. A study by Mupedziswa and Gumbo (2001) on female informal traders in Zimbabwe reveals that the economic reform programme in Zimbabwe has had an impact on spousal relations as squabbles over money increased. The women accused the men of becoming more abusive, aggressive, and violent and some men were said to have deserted their matrimonial homes (Mupedziswa and Gumbo, 2001). Such masculine behaviours, which tend to be a manifestation of patriarchal orientations, reflect men's defensive reactions to their threatened masculinity by the harsh economic environment.

Although we find more women than men in the informal sector, it is important to understand what kinds of jobs are performed by women. Mupedziswa and Gumbo (2001) observe that women in the informal sector perform jobs associated with domesticity that do not bring in sufficient income. Similarly, MacPherson (1998) observed that most women in the informal sector in Zimbabwe engage in vending activities which also do not yield much income. Nevertheless, with the little earnings from their activities in the informal sector, women contributed immensely to the needs of the household compared to men who had been laid off.

The economic reform programme exacerbated the economic situation of marginalised groups, particularly the poor and uneducated African women. Chirisa (2013:12) concurs with MacPherson and adds that women in the informal sector sell food and merchandise, and are dependent on jobs as day labourers or other jobs within the informal sector where they are vulnerable to exploitation. Furthermore, women who engage in these petty jobs are often stigmatised and associated with high levels of poverty and may even engage in sex work. It can thus be concluded that due to ESAP and the subsequent economic crisis, African women in Zimbabwe continued to suffer from poverty (Mutangi 2016). The state's ambivalence on gender policies continued as in the practical sense the numerous legal forms and policies were never fully implemented.

2.6.3.3 Women and the Decade of Economic Turmoil in Zimbabwe

The period 2000-2009 has been described as the decade of economic turmoil marked by serious political and economic crises culminating in a hyper-inflationary environment (Sadomba, 2011). The same period was characterised by high traffic of labour migrancy into the diaspora, particularly South Africa and the United Kingdom to cushion the economic hardships. During this period most households were characterised by abject poverty where people would go for several days without having a meal.

During the same period women's circumstances were further compounded by Operation *Murambatsvina* (Restore Order) which saw the demolition of informal industry structures (which had become the source of livelihood) and housing units deemed illegal by the state (Potts, 2006 and Tibaijuka, 2005). The operation devastated the livelihoods of most of the urban population and created conditions of extreme poverty in urban areas. According to a report by Tibaijuka (in Potts, 2006), about 650 000 to 700 000 people had lost either the basis for their livelihoods or their homes, or both. The final tally of Zimbabwean people affected directly and indirectly by this process was estimated at 2.4 million people (Potts, 2006:295). The government was insensitive to the plight of people, despite having full knowledge that the informal industry had become the source of livelihood for the majority of the urban populace, it proceeded with its Operation *Murambatsvina* project. Since women tended to dominate the informal industry, it follows that they were the worst hit by Operation *Murambatsvina*, further consolidating the feminisation of poverty.

The informal industry became especially prominent from 2006 and Mutangi (2016) observes that 2007 and 2008 signified massive inflation and further economic decline which forced more women to join the informal sector as money changers; cross border traders and small business owners. Many women defied the feminine mystique (that the women's place is the kitchen) and joined their male counterparts in the struggle to eke out a living by crossing the borders to so-called greener pastures (Sadomba, 2011). The economic turmoil can be attributed to poor governance by the state and worse still, its ambivalent attitude towards the gender transformation agenda. While there have been deliberate attempts by the state in post-independent Zimbabwe to improve access to employment opportunities for women, the regrettable situation is that women still occupy subordinate positions in society.

2.6.3.4 Women and Decision Making Positions in Zimbabwe

Since independence, Zimbabwe has crafted numerous sound legal reforms and policies that are purported to improve the circumstances of African women in the country. As already mentioned, the state's ambivalent attitude in implementing the crafted gender policies and legal reforms has remained conspicuous throughout the post-independent era. The 2013 constitution of Zimbabwe also makes a firm commitment to the gender transformation agenda (Dube, 2014). Article 17(1) of the new constitution indicates that the state must promote full gender balance in the Zimbabwean society, and in particular, the state must provide for the full participation of women in all spheres of the Zimbabwean society on the basis of equality with men (GoZ, 2013). The 2013 constitution clearly states:

The state must take all measures to ensure that both genders are equally represented in all institutions and agencies of government at every level; and women constitute at least half the membership of all commissions and other elective and appointed governmental bodies established by or under the constitution or any Act of Parliament; and the state and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must take practical measures to ensure that women have access to resources, including land, on the basis of equality with men; and the state must take positive measures to rectify gender discrimination and imbalances resulting from the past practices and policies (GoZ: 2013:20).

The provisions of the constitution on gender issues are clear and consistent with the legal reforms and policies that have been instituted since independence in 1980. However, gender

equity remains a mirage for women as the Zimbabwean state remains ambivalent on implementing gender policies. According to the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development (2013: IV), the first National Gender Policy (NGP) gave way to a range of initiatives meant to address gender inequalities; and was underpinned by the ethos of growth with equity which was implemented under four thematic areas: Women in Politics and Decision-Making, Women and the Economy, Education and Training of Women and Institutional Mechanisms for advancement of women's total emancipation and empowerment. The national gender policy is clear and articulate on approaches to emancipate and empower women.

Similarly the second NGP seeks to achieve a gender just society where men and women enjoy equality and equity and participate as equal partners in the development process of the country (GoZ, 2013). Just as is the case with the first NGP, the second gender policy is also clear on what needs to be done to empower women; the challenge is the implementation which tends to be affected by deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs and orientations in the Zimbabwean society.

Despite such progressive provisions of the 2013 constitution and national gender policies, the composition of the 2013 cabinet reflects the Zimbabwean state's great ambivalence in implementing gender policies. Dube (2013) observed how the former President Mugabe defiantly appointed a regressive male-dominated cabinet with only three women from a total of 26 ministers, three out of 13 ministers of state and five out of 24 deputy ministers. This effectively means that only 11.5% of the 2013 cabinet is female (Zaba and Ndebele, 2013). The assumption here is that development priorities undertaken by a male bloated cabinet tend to be gender blind, hence women's economic status remains subordinated and this affects household income as well as marital relations. It can also be argued that women in leadership positions are more likely to represent the needs and interests of other women because they understand them better. Dube (2014:3) further observes that no woman was accorded the prerogative to take charge of the important ministries such as Ministry of Finance, Justice, Foreign Affairs and Defence. This confirms stereotypical perceptions on femininity where women are perceived as weak and incompetent hence their appointment to weaker cabinet portfolios with 'feminine' characteristics. In this regard Davis (in Dube 2014:9) argues that the relationship between women ministers and 'feminine' cabinet assignments in Zimbabwe stems from broader tendencies to perceive certain ministries as closer to women's concerns. Such

perceptions tend to relegate women to the periphery of the development agenda, remaining subordinate to men as they lack representation in decision-making positions. Their general subordinate economic status often spills over into other aspects of life such as weakening their bargaining power in marital relationships; allowing men to marry as many wives as they wish and even engaging in extra-marital affairs, including *small house* relationships.

2.7 THE PRACTICE OF POLYGyny

Polygyny was a common marital practice in most African societies before the advent of colonialism and urbanisation. According to Jonas (2012:143) the term ‘polygamy’ is derived from the Greek word *polugamos*, which literally means ‘often marrying’. Generally, people use the term ‘polygamy’ to refer to the simultaneous unions of a husband to multiple spouses or a custom of having more than one wife at the same time. It is important to note that such a meaning is technically incorrect. In this regard, Zeitzen (2008:2) postulates that in its wide and correct sense, polygamy refers to a marriage which includes more than one partner and it exists in two forms, polygyny and polyandry. Jonas (2012:143) further elaborates that polygyny is when a man is married to more than one wife, whereas polyandry refers to an arrangement where a woman is married to more than one husband. Similarly, Falen (2003:53) says that polygyny refers to one type of polygamy in which men have multiple wives (co-wives), as opposed to polyandrous polygamy in which a woman has multiple husbands. Thus, as indicated above, polygyny and polygamy are not synonymous, nor can they be used interchangeably. However, the reason why so many people use the two words interchangeably is that polyandry is a very rare practice, especially in Southern African societies, hence for many people polygyny is synonymous with polygamy. To illustrate the rarity of polyandry, a study of 250 societies by Murdock in 1949 (in Henslin 2003) reveals that polyandry existed in two societies only –among the Marquessons of Polynesia and the Todas of India. This study thus appropriately adopts the term ‘polygyny’ to refer to a marriage union where a man has more than one wife and uses it consistently throughout the entire study.

Traditionally, patriarchal ideologies and mechanisms have tended to influence conjugal relationships in most Southern African societies and cultures. Such beliefs and practices have strongly endured and tend to permeate contemporary societies, albeit refined and transformed so as to be compatible with the ideals of the so-called modern world. It can be observed that the nature and implications of polygynous marital relationships tend to be the same in all Bantu-speaking societies in Southern Africa (Bourdillon 1998:48). In the context of the Shona

traditional marriage systems, polygyny is the practice of having more than one wife, with formal payment of *roora* (bridewealth) and full social acknowledgement and support. In this regard, Bourdillon (1998:48), Tatira (2010:44) and Chavhunduka (1979:18) observe that in traditional Shona society, a man could have as many wives as he could afford, provided that he did not neglect any one of them. In the context of polygyny, referred to as *barika* among the Shona, the first wife was known as *vahosi*, meaning principal wife, and the youngest wife *nyachide*, meaning the most adored one (Masasire 1996:42). For traditional Shona culture, marriage, including polygyny, is a contract between two families and not the individuals in the relationship. The current study examines, amongst other things, how the *small house* phenomenon compares with polygyny in this respect.

Polygyny in traditional Shona society was of salient importance as it was not only a type of marriage but also a value system which provided social and economic support for women and children. In the Shona cultural marriage system, a man was obliged to take his deceased brother's wife and children as his own (Chavhunduka 1979:18; Tatira 2010:38; Bourdillon 1998:47). In this regard, Masasire (1996:46) elaborates that for some women the practice of widow inheritance offered some advantages in that it ensured continued social and economic security after the death of the husband. Because of this need for social and economic security, some widows actually encouraged their husband's surviving brothers to enter into a husband-wife relationship.

Polygyny among the Shona also included a practice known as *kuzvarira* (daughter pledging) where a poor man offered his daughter to a rich man in exchange for food or as a way of clearing his debt (Zvobgo 1986:44; Chavhunduka 1979). For traditional Shona society, polygyny was a solution to sex imbalance (although extra-marital affairs have always been in existence) when women outnumbered men (Zvobgo 1986:44-45). If looked at from this angle, polygyny in traditional Shona culture offered solutions to socioeconomic problems. However, these marriage practices have become an anathema in many sectors of the contemporary Zimbabwean society, perhaps because they cease to be compatible with the changing times.

Another critical issue in the traditional Shona marriage system had to do with the payment of *roora*. The issue of *roora* is dealt with in greater detail later in this Chapter. For now it suffices to mention it as an important aspect in the Shona marriage system. The payment of *roora* by the bridegroom's family to the bride's family was a widely practised custom among the Shona and it symbolised the giving up of a daughter to the bridegroom's family (Zvobgo 1986:45;

Gelfand 1979:177; Masasire 1996:46). It would thus follow that if a man decided to marry several wives, he was required by custom to pay *roora* for all of them; hence polygyny was a preserve of the rich or at least relatively well-off men. The current study explores the issue of *roora* in the context of the *small house* relationship vis-à-vis social exchanges in such unions.

2.7.1 The Economics of Polygyny in Shona Society

The economics of polygyny in Shona culture correlates with other Bantu-speaking cultures in Southern Africa (Bourdillon 1979:49; Gelfand 1973:176; Masasire 1996:42). Studies carried out by different sociologists and anthropologists in Southern Africa on marriage systems attribute the emergence of polygyny in African societies to a number of factors, including political, social and economic factors. Boserup (in Singh 1988:7) observes that explanations offered for the practice of polygyny in Southern African societies are mostly in terms of cultural and traditional factors, including men's attitudes towards women and the father's desire to perpetuate his name and prestige through children. However, although such explanations may be relevant, they tend to gloss over the economic factors that seem to determine marital relationships to a greater extent.

Prior to the coming of the Europeans to Zimbabwe, the Shona marriage system, as was the case with other Southern African societies, was regulated by the socio-cultural, socio-political and socioeconomic activities of the time. In this regard, Bigombe and Khadiagala (2007:7), Boserup (2007:25) and Aluko and Aransiola (2003:76) observe that in traditional African rural areas, polygyny survived largely because of the imperatives established by the sexual division of labour that marks the sphere of agriculture. On the same note, Naksamboon and Mondain (2013:7) maintain that traditional agricultural practices in Southern Africa accorded productive and reproductive value to women, especially with traditional hoe farming where gender roles are quite distinct. Men were usually involved in the land preparation process and women in the farming process (Boserup 2007:25). In so doing, such an economic production system places value on the females' labour and reproductive capacities. For men in African societies several wives and children meant a reservoir of labour to work in the fields (Aluko & Aransiola 2003:176; Chireshe 2012:26; Jonas 2012:2; Chavhunduka 1979). Similarly, Boserup (2007:25) observes that in traditional agricultural societies the main productive input is human capital, implying additional wives and children in the household can increase labour resources and thus encouraging polygynous unions. It must be acknowledged that this applies to pre-industrialised societies where human capital was an economic asset and where more family members were

equated to increased economic production. It can therefore be argued that the value of women's labour in agriculture contributed greatly to the emergence of polygyny in Southern African societies. It thus becomes clear that men were motivated to engage in polygynous marital relationships by economic factors. In the same vein, a study by Bourdillon (1998:49) in Zimbabwe on the Shona culture revealed that the more wives a man had, the more children he was likely to have, and a large group of descendants meant a large labour force to work the fields, which in turn resulted in wealth and high status. However, a close analysis of this scenario would reveal that although polygyny created opportunities for wealth, one had to be rich in the first place to afford this kind of a marriage. It would thus follow that polygyny in traditional Shona society made those men who were already rich, acquire more wealth. Thus, despite its appearance to outsiders as a highly undesirable social system, polygyny has been a well-developed, coherent and even preferred way of life for many Africans since pre-colonial times (Hayase & Llaw, 1997:293; Jauch, Edwards & Cupido, 2010:8).

As alluded to in the preceding paragraph, the main motivation for polygyny in Southern African societies was economic and was in turn related to reproduction. In this respect, Naksamboon and Mondain (2013:48) and Chavhunduka (1979) agree, stating that these two motivations are interrelated and can be explained by the kinship system and economic gains made possible through polygyny. The Shona kinship system relies heavily on the existing bonds between individuals in the family and it is through these bonds that people prosper economically through cooperation. It can thus be strongly argued that polygyny coincides with the Shona kinship system, as large families are favoured since through polygyny men are able to maximise women's economic and reproductive capabilities in the form of additional labour from wives and children. On the relevance of coherent kinship systems, Zeitzen (2008:2) mentions: "The larger the family the larger the area that can be cultivated, and the more it can hunt, the better it can rear cattle and increase food production." However, it is also important to note that in this traditional society, women had the opportunity to decide whether to marry polygynously or monogamously. In this regard, Naksamboon and Mondain (2013:48), as well as Kanazawa and Still (1999:32), observe that in traditional African society, if resource inequalities among men are great, women choose to marry polygynously but if resources among men are more or less the same, they choose to marry monogamously. Here women's agency is reflected in their volition to choose a favourable marital relationship. It would generally follow that the economic aspect coincides with gender dynamics and marriage systems in Southern African societies, as multiple wives, and by extension many children, are valued because they continue

to provide essential labour services in rural agricultural production. Thus, to a large extent, polygyny in Southern African societies is valued because of the access it accords men and their relatives to women's and children's labour; economic success may thus be a consequence as well as a cause of polygyny.

Besides the economic aspect of polygyny among the Shona, there were also social and political factors that contributed to the emergence of polygyny as a marriage institution. Traditionally, having many wives and many children was a status symbol as it signified the amount of power and influence one had in society (Chavhunduka 1979:19; Jonas 2012:2; Naksamboon & Mondain 2013:48). On the same note, a study by Chireshe (2012:26) among the Shona people of Zimbabwe reveals that because of political and social prestige, most of the Shona chiefs have several wives. Gelfand (1979:177), as well as Aluko and Aransiola (2003:176), further the argument by saying that the other reason for polygyny was the desire to enlarge the clan so that it would defend itself against attack from outside; thus the clan provided physical security. In other words, polygyny ensured the social and political stability and continuity of the family and clan. As has been already alluded, it was not only physical security that was provided by the polygynous marital institution but also social security. Hence, Chavhunduka (1979:22) elaborates that several wives and subsequently several children provided social security in times of ill-health and old age. Chavhunduka further opines that the largeness of a clan was associated with power and prestige in most African societies. By implication, the numerous children produced from a polygynous marital relationship can assist in building and strengthening a political powerbase in traditional Shona society. On the whole, the traditional Shona polygynous marital relationships were mediated by socio-cultural, socio-political and, most importantly, socioeconomic factors.

Another contributing factor to the emergence of polygyny had to do with stereotypical perceptions of male sexuality. In a patriarchal society, as is the case with many African societies, men with many sexual conquests tend to be admired for their supposed virility. The study by Zeitzen (2008:61) in East African Mandinka society reveals that the possession of several wives is seen as an expression of male virility. In this regard the claim on men's supposed virility can be viewed as one of the stereotypical perceptions about masculinity and femininity informed by a patriarchal ideology.

The control of woman's sexuality is another critical issue of gender dynamics in traditional Shona marriage systems. Gender inequalities in the context of marriage institutions,

particularly polygynous ones, may stem from women's economic dependence and the socio-cultural regulation of their sexuality and fertility (Jauch et al 2010:218; Masenda-Nzira 2003:3). Thus, the payment of *roora* remains central to patriarchal control over women's sexuality. It is important to note that among the Shona people it is this issue of bridewealth that mediates the notion of levirate (wife inheritance) and sororate (wife replacement) marriages which result in polygynous marital relationships (Chavhunduka 1979:19; Zvobgo 1986:44). Gender inequalities are conspicuously entrenched in such practices as a widow does not have the power to decide otherwise. In this regard, Masenda-Nzira (2003:4) argues that, like gender, sexuality is political and is organised into systems of power which reward some individuals while punishing and suppressing others. Masenda-Nzira further elaborates that data from her 2003 research show that the co-wife dynamics in polygynous unions are characterised by a scramble for resources, including sex, and that the gender dynamics supported male privileges and dominance while women play a subordinate role in the union. Inequalities are portrayed in such a way that when a wife in a polygynous union feels like having sex, she may not have it; she has to patiently wait her for turn. Sexuality is thus a tool that society uses to create hierarchies within heterosexual relations (Masenda-Nzira 2003:4). It would thus follow that the consolidation of these hierarchies makes masculinity a priority over femininity and that it would be impossible to talk about women's empowerment without addressing issues of sexuality. The institution of polygyny tends to be embedded in patriarchal traditions that raise profound questions about the volition of women who choose to enter polygynous marital relationships (Andrews 2009:368). Thus, it can be argued that polygyny is an institution in which women's sexuality is controlled in order to maintain the supremacy of men over women; hence sexuality becomes an issue for concern in *small house* relationships. The interplay between femininity, sexuality and culture within African societies makes women subordinate in marriage and sexual relationships (Kambarami 2006:2). It gives men the mandate and autonomy to engage in extramarital affairs supported by the tradition of polygyny and patriarchal ideologies and mechanisms.

2.7.2 Polygyny: A Contested Terrain

The advent of colonialism and subsequent Westernisation brought cultural beliefs and marriage practices that were in sharp contrast with the Shona marriage practices in general and the polygynous marital relationships in particular. In this respect, Bigombe and Khadiagala (2007) argue that the ideals of Westernisation and modernity tend to contradict much of the cultural

practices of the Bantu people of Southern Africa, particularly their traditional marriage systems including polygyny. Pertaining to polygyny, the so-called modern ideals have created incompatible perceptions between men and women concerning the once cherished marital practice. In several sections of the pre-colonial societies in Southern Africa, polygyny was not only a marriage choice but also a value system that inspired and shaped family relations. Thus, as a value system it has been in constant tension with and is resilient to the marital ideology of monogamy (Jonas 2012:27; Bigombe & Khadiagala 2007:7). The phenomenon of polygyny is therefore debated in terms of the traditional and modern perceptions of the institution of marriage.

A study by Van der Vliet (1991) in Eastern Cape, South Africa, clearly shows that the marriage institution, particularly polygynous practice, is a contested terrain and the centre of controversy tends to pivot on tradition versus modernity. Van der Vliet (1991:222) argues that men often use the tradition of polygyny to justify their philandering behaviour. Similarly, Zeitzen (2008:148) observes that husbands' and wives' conflicting conceptions of what modern marriage should entail, have resulted in continuous tension between women's monogamous ideology and men's polygynous ideals. The institution of 'outside wives' tend to represent an African cultural renaissance since the practice tends to be mediated by principles rooted in African traditional cultures (Zeitzen 2008:152). Polygyny became unpopular with women as a result of urbanisation and formal education. However, in his study of the Shona culture, Bourdillon (1998:49) observes that for the Shona people, a shortage of land in the rural areas and the expense of keeping extra heads in the town make polygyny an economic burden rather than an asset, though he acknowledges that the influence of Christianity and Western culture have reduced the incidence of polygynous marriages in Zimbabwean society. In concurrence, Hayase and Llaw (1997:302), Zvobgo (1986:44) and Chavhunduka (1979) argue that rooted in the tradition of missionary schools, the formal education of most Southern African countries introduced Western values, including the preference for monogamy. Thus women with formal education were less likely to engage in polygynous marriages because formal education embodied Western ideals which contradict certain African traditional marital practices. Similarly, a study by Bourdillon (1998:49) on the Shona culture reveals that in upper class circles, especially in urban areas, people look down on a man who takes more than one wife.

The results of Van der Vliet's (1991) study indicate that Xhosa men in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, are seen to be moulded by their interpretation of traditional patriarchy, which is firmly

rooted in the men's world and perceived as sexually vigorous. She further elaborates that a man who did not live up to this masculine mystique risked being derided as *isishumane* (a 'sissy' or unlucky and unpopular with women) in their male peer group. Consequently, many men compete for acquiring several sexual conquests to prove their masculinity. In this regard, Van der Vliet (1991:222) and Hayase and Llaw (1997:298) found that men often use the tradition of polygyny to justify their engagement with multiple concurrent sexual partners. In analysing these views closely, one may observe that men have vested interests in polygyny and would want everyone to venerate such social constructs as though they are sacred and indispensable, whilst in reality the opposite is the case. The findings of Van der Vliet's (1991) study clearly show that some men justify their philandering behaviour by evoking the tradition of polygynous marital practice, for example, one of her interviews with one man reveals:

Well, I think it is meant for a man because our fathers used to have three or four wives, it comes from tradition. You have a string of girl friends in the place of the many wives your grandfather used to have (Van der Vliet 1991:231).

This view of marriage suggests a conceptual divide, pitting traditional African marriage against modern Western (Christian) marriage (Falen 2008:53). Similarly, Western feminism and its concomitant abhorrence of double sexual standards tend to influence secretive multiple concurrent sexual relationships by African men who masquerade as 'modern' men in monogamous marital unions.

As mentioned earlier, marriage institutions, particularly polygynous marital relationships, are contested terrains. Van der Vliet (1991:234) reveals that just as men use Xhosa traditions to justify their promiscuous behaviour, so too women use their own construction of 'modern times' to attempt to coerce their husbands into their own preferred marriage practice; the monogamous marriage institution. Zeitzen (2008:151) concurs and adds that for many married urban women, present 'outside wives' and the traditional polygynous institution are more likely to represent regression than modernity. In the same vein, Boltz-Laemel and Chort (2015:2) expand on this, stating that socio-anthropological research and anecdotal evidence confirm that polygyny is an undesirable outcome for women in contemporary society. However, some men tend to criticise modern wives who resent the practice of polygyny whether it is the traditional one or the reinvented one. Paradoxically, the practice of keeping 'outside wives', instead of the polygynous wives may represent African men's attempt to embody Western ideals of a modern

man. In this regard, the term ‘clandestine polygyny’ developed and remains common among certain African Christians (Falen 2008:56).

The aspects of traditional marriage systems which women wish to change are labelled backward, uncivilised or unchristian. In modern society, women advocate a monogamous marriage model as the ideal and as a more appropriate marital union in contemporary societies (Zeitzen 2008:156). Similarly, in his study of Shona marriages, Tatira (2010:64) confirms that polygynous marital relationships are vehemently contested as the ‘modern girl’ resents them while the ‘modern boy’ still hopes for one. One can therefore argue that in their bid to avoid being labelled backward, uncivilised or unchristian, men tend to resort to secretive sexual arrangements like the ‘outside wives’ or the *small house* union, or they may engage mistresses or concubines, justifying it by the legacy of the polygynous history of African societies and cultures. In his study on changing perceptions of marriage in Nigeria, Karanja (1987:253) reveals that some male informants contend that the African man is ‘naturally’ polygynous and that ‘outside wives’ are an innovation for confronting changing circumstances. Although the marriage institution remains a contested terrain, marital relationships remain skewed in favour of men because of the strong patriarchal beliefs rooted in African traditions and cultures.

2.7.3 The Transforming Polygynous Institution

The political landscape and the economic dispensation of most Southern African societies have been tremendously transformed and reconfigured as a result of industrialisation, urbanisation, colonisation, education and Christianity. These vehicles have had a depressing and detrimental effect on polygyny since the new economic dispensation – the wage economy or market economy – was not compatible with the traditional Shona polygynous marital relationship.

However, it may be argued that polygynous marital relationships tend to endure, albeit transformed in more subtle ways (Tatira 2010:51; Chireshe 2012:27; Karanja 1987). Paradoxically, the political and economic conditions that were compatible with polygynous marital relationships have since disappeared but the practice of one man being sexually and economically tied to more than one woman at the same time thrives. The study thus explores the conditions under which de facto “polygynous” relationships in contemporary Shona society thrive. In analysing contemporary Shona society, one may observe that many of the advantages of polygyny have since disappeared. For instance, the need to have wives and children for the defence of society has largely disappeared because of the absence of such wars (Chavhunduka

1979). Similarly, in farming, children are no longer an economic asset in many areas because of modern farming technology and the fact that children now spend more time in school. By and large the new economic dispensation demeans the relevance of polygynous relationships; hence the existence of ‘outside wives’ in lieu of polygyny remains an issue worth investigating.

The culture of polygyny in Southern African societies remained relatively undisturbed until the major expansion of the European powers in the late 19th century (Hayase and Llaw 1997:2). Naksamboon and Mondain (2013:5) further elaborate that although polygyny is generally considered as going against modernity and is meant to disappear, it is nevertheless still practised, even though its forms have evolved across time as a result of socioeconomic changes and modernisation, which are all part of globalisation. Accordingly, these perceptions raise a number of questions: to what extent is polygyny still practised, under which forms and what are the contemporary motivations underlying the choice of polygynous unions? Zeitzen (2008:152) also argues that polygyny is evolving into new sexual relationships as it adapts to ever-changing circumstances and new interpersonal relationships. Thus, the modernisation of Africa has seen the traditional polygynous practice transforming into different types of concurrent sexual relationships.

As a result of modernisation, marriage in contemporary Zimbabwean society has begun to take on a double face for some in civil and Christian marriages, owing to the discrepancy between reality and actual practice, resulting in multiple concurrent sexual relationships (Tatira 2010:51). This is confirmed by the findings of a study by Bourdillon (1993) on the Shona culture. Bourdillon (1993:35) argues: “where a man lives in circles where polygyny is frowned upon, he might acquire a second, unofficial wife, and she is maintained in a separate household”. From the literature examined above, it can be strongly argued that polygyny tends provide a cultural background for *small house* relationships.

2.8 DIFFERENT FORMS OF EXTRA-MARITAL AFFAIRS

Extra-marital affairs are not only found in contemporary African societies; they have roots in traditional African society. According to Delius and Glaser (2004), in the traditional African society a numerically significant number of women lived in their fathers’ homesteads; widows, divorcees and unmarried mothers who largely controlled their sexuality and only experienced mild social opprobrium. The argument that polygyny prevented extra-marital affairs is

countered since for these women, their sexual partners included unmarried men and both monogamously and polygynously married men. In this regard, Delius and Glaser further argue that marriage was more about rights to offspring, transaction of cattle and organisation of homestead labour than the control of sexuality. Alberti (in Delius and Glaser, 2004:89) observes that there appears to be a double standard among the Xhosa as adultery is only committed by women; men are not restricted to one woman. Monning (in Delius & Glaser, 2004:90) also reported that amongst the Pedi, extra-marital intercourse is possible and even socially accepted and culturally provided for, however the parties should be circumspect in their relations and maintain the proper demeanour. It can thus be seen that the sexual practices in African society included a history of extra-marital liaisons.

A study by Helle-Valle (2004) in Botswana on socio-economic characteristics of households reveals that a significant number of young and middle aged women engage in informal sexual relationships that are locally termed *bobelete*. These relationships are more or less permanent but remain informal and involve a transfer of economically significant gifts from the man to the woman. The rationale for these exchanges is that women 'give' men sex; hence the men have to reciprocate by giving gifts (Helle-Vale, 2004:196). These gifts may take several different forms which include cattle, building of the house, but also food, clothes and cash are common. *The bobelete* relationship draws several parallels with the *small house* relationship; it is informal, long lasting and involves support of the woman by the man for the exchange of domestic and sexual services. However, Helle-Valle does not shed light on whether the *bobelete* relationship was secretly maintained or not.

Other forms of sexual exchanges should not be confused with the *small house* relationship. For example, in simple terms prostitution is the act of having sex for money or other materials for survival (Fayemi, 2009:202). The *small house* is different from prostitution where women may have casual sex with different men and receive payment for each sexual encounter. Unlike in *small house* relationships, in prostitution the chances of developing relational bonds are minimal and the male partner is in most cases referred to as a client (Fayemi, 2009:202). In concurrence, Forster (2000) elaborates that prostitution, also described as 'sex work', involves some form of exchange of sexual services for money and these can be purely episodic transactions although in some cases there may be regular rather than casual customers. Phiri (2013) concurs with Forster and adds that selling sex is technically prostitution and such a practice comes in different types.

Related to prostitution is the practice of transactional sex. Transactional sex can be defined as non-commercial, non-marital sexual relationship motivated by the implicit assumption that sex will be exchanged for material support or other benefits (Stoebenau, Heise, Wamoyi & Bobrova, 2016: 187). It refers to a sexual relationship outside of marriage, or sex work, structured by implicit assumption that sex will be exchanged for survival and subsistence needs (Dunkle, et al 2007). The distinction between prostitution and transactional sex is that for transactional sex, there is no predetermined amount of money, and that it may be framed in the context of an emotional intimacy and may not always be driven by poverty (Hunters, 2002 & Leclerc-Madlala, 2003). Transactional sex may reflect women's agency to advance their education, gain employment, or business opportunities or simply achieve high status. Research in a number of sub-Saharan African contexts has conclusively demonstrated that exchange of sex for material resources is common practice, and the vast majority of women who engage in such transactions do not identify as sex workers (Hunter, 2002 & Leclerc-Madlala, 2003).

Sexual relationships outside marriage were very common in Africa, especially involving men of the royalty and nobility and the woman in such a relationship was commonly described as a mistress (Uchendu, 1965). The children born to such relationships were counted as illegitimate and were not allowed inheriting the father's title or his estate even in cases where there were no legitimate heirs (Eisenach, 2004).

Concubine relationships tend to differ from *small house* relationships in several respects. Concubinage is an interpersonal and sexual relationship in which the couple cannot be married because of several factors such as differences in cultures, religious prohibitions, existing marriage and lack of recognition by appropriate authorities among others (Uchendu, 1965; Lovejoy, 1988 & Eisenach, 2004). Concubinage can also be defined as the more or less permanent cohabitation (outside the marriage bond) of a man and a woman or women, whose position would be that of secondary wives, women bought, captured in war or domestic slaves and the woman in such a relationship is referred to as a concubine (Eisenach, 2004). It is important to note that concubinage as a phenomenon is not tied to Africa; in fact it is more pronounced in Western and Eastern countries. Unlike the *small house*, historically the concubine was not secretly kept. The prevalence of concubinage and the status of rights and expectations of a concubine have varied among cultures and societies as have the rights of children of a concubine (Lovejoy, 1988). Historically, concubinage was entered into voluntarily (by the woman or her family) as it provided a source of economic security for the individual woman but there was also involuntary or servile concubinage sometimes involving

sexual slavery (Eisenach, 2004). In the contemporary society the term concubine is used to refer to non-marital partnerships of earlier times; otherwise in contemporary society, a non-marital domestic relationship is commonly referred to as cohabitation and the woman involved in such a relationship is referred to as a girlfriend or mistress.

Various forms of extra-marital relationships should not be confused with the *small house* relationship, just as different marital forms accepted in Zimbabwe should not be confounded with a *small house* relationship.

2.9 RECOGNISED MARRIAGE FORMS IN ZIMBABWE

In accordance with the current Marriage Act of Zimbabwe, there are three types of marriages: civil marriage, registered customary marriage and unregistered customary marriage. Among the three types of marriages, the civil union (Chapter 5:11), also popularly known as Chapter 37, is associated with modernity. This marriage strictly emphasises the notion of one man and one wife and may only be conducted by a magistrate or designated marriage officer. Even if men who are married under Chapter 5:11 may want to marry ‘polygynously’, the provisions of the Marriage Act do not allow such unions.

In conjunction with the Marriage Act, the Legal Age of Majority Act of 1982 empowers women to enter into a marriage union at 18 without the consent of their parents or guardians (Dube 2013:6). Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) (2013:5) further elaborates that prior to the passage of the LAMA of 1982, African women were perceived as perpetual minors who could not enter into contracts or sue anyone without the assistance of their fathers or guardians. The second type of registered marriage is the Customary Marriage Act Chapter 5:07, which used to be called 2.38. The provisions of this act require that each wife in polygynous marital relationships has their own marriage certificate (Dube, 2013:6).

There is also a third type of customary marriage which is not registered. In terms of the law, such a marriage is an Unregistered Customary Law Union and this union comes into being when a man pays bridewealth for a woman (Dube, 2013:6). It is important to understand that both the Marriage Act Chapter 5:07 and the Unregistered Customary Law Union allow polygynous marital relationships. Similarly, in the South African context, the 1998 Recognition of Customary Marriages Act (RCMA) regularised the polygynous marital practice (Stacey & Meadow, 2009). Its central thrust was to ensure the consent of parties (particularly women) to such marital practices and to inject state regulation into customary marriages.

The existence of laws that make polygyny a legitimate marriage system in African societies points to the endurance of patriarchal relations in African culture. In this regard, polygyny can be seen as the hallmark of patriarchy as it perpetuates gender inequalities between men and women in such marital unions (Munson & Saulnier 2013:29). It is therefore of paramount importance to understand that patriarchy has grave ramifications for economic, social and other power relations as it leads to asymmetrical relations in the family (Abbot, Wallace & Tyler 2005:37). Consequently, the association between polygyny and patriarchy and the subjection of women tends to affect women's perception about themselves. Although the law requires that when one enters into a customary marriage union this must be registered, few men and women understand the importance of registering their marriages and usually it is a husband's prerogative to make sure that the marriage is recognised by law (Chitau-Mawema 2003; Dube 2013:6). Such a scenario works to the advantage of men and is clear evidence of male dominance in marriage institutions. On the whole, marriage laws in Zimbabwe accept polygyny as a legitimate marriage practice as long as it is registered under customary law. It would thus follow that *small house* relationships are not legally recognised since they are neither accepted under civil law nor recognised under customary law.

2.10 FAMILY ROLES AND THE CONCEPT OF THE SHONA FAMILY

The family may be regarded as the most fundamental unit of all societies. According to Kimani and Kombo (2010:12), the family is usually the major source of the basic necessities of life and health, love and tenderness, adequate food, clean water, a place and time to rest, clothing and sanitation and all these are made possible by the prevailing socioeconomic, environmental and sometimes political conditions.

Marriage institutions, families and households tend to serve specific functions in society. From his study of 250 societies, Murdock in 1949 (in Haralambos & Holborn 2008:462) observed that the family as a social institution performs four basic functions in all societies, which are economic, educational, sexual and reproductive. Stacey and Meadow (2007:71) and Rabe (2014:233) concur and elaborate that the family is the primary socialising agent of children where parents play a particularly important role by instilling norms and values in respective communities and societies. In the same vein, Kimani and Kombo (2010:12) postulate that the family is a cohesive unit which ideally provides economic, social and psychological security to all its members. Thus, as an agent of primary socialisation the family transmits the norms, values, beliefs, knowledge systems, skills and attitudes deemed important by society to the next

generation. In this regard, Degbey (in Kimani & Kombo 2010:12) maintains that the family defines social and moral norms and safeguards both material and spiritual customs and traditions, as well as providing role models in preparing the way for adulthood. It is thus critical to observe that both parents in the context of the family play a specific pivotal role in the upbringing of children. Such observations point to possible ramifications in regard to disengaged fatherhood in *small house* relationships.

The family functions identified by Murdock in 1949 may not to be exhaustive of the family obligations. While Hill (2011:4) acknowledges the family functions posited by Murdock, she adds that the family cares for the frail and elderly family members, provides labourers needed for the economy and meets the emotional needs of family members. Tatira (2010:20) concurs and adds that families are custodians of culture and safety nets to all in times of trial; hence they provide social security to the old and the sick. The family is therefore like an ecological system; what affects one member affects the other members and the whole system (Kimani & Kombo 2010:12). As also argued by Caldwell (1976), a family is an investment in the economic sense; hence most parents look to their children in times of need. It can thus be argued that the family plays an indispensable role in the survival of society. A further analysis of the family functions in contemporary African society reveals that the diversification of tasks tends to create a clear dichotomy between masculinity and femininity, as the tasks are divided according to gender. In this regard, the mother and the father initiate their daughters and sons into their respective chores and responsibilities.

2.10.1 Fatherhood

As stated, the Shona history reveals a patriarchal, patrilocal and (in some cases) a polygynous kinship system with power lying in the hands of elder men (Chirozva et al 2006:9). In this regard, the absence of fathers in a Shona family not only makes the family vulnerable to social challenges but may actually threaten the very existence of that family.

There are many reasons for absent fatherhood which include unemployment and poverty, labour migrancy, divorce, separation or even death (Mavungu, Thompson De-Boor and Mphaka 2013:22). The notion of absent fatherhood is relevant to *small house* relationships where fathers pay occasional visits to the *small house* households. Findings from a study by Mavungu et al (2013:28) show that absent fatherhood has a behavioural, emotional, social, financial and cultural consequence for children. Another critical aspect for this study is the

examination of the father's responsibility for the needs of children and their mother. Responsivity is another critical aspect of fatherhood in a family set up. In this regard, Matta and Knudson-Martin (2006) postulate that responsivity captures father's sensitivity and attention to the emotional needs of children and their mother.

2.10.2 Types of Fatherhood

Fatherhood is a relationship between a man and his biological (and perhaps adopted) children (Richter et al 2012:4). Marsiglio, Day and Lamb (2008:275), Morrell (2006:14) and Rabe (2006) postulate that there are multiple forms of fatherhood. These types of fatherhood are linked to paternal rights, responsibilities and types of involvement. Three types of fatherhood, which include social, biological and economic fatherhood, were described and hence I explore these types as they relate to the *small house* phenomenon.

2.10.2.1 Economic Fatherhood

Economic fatherhood entails the breadwinner role and emphasises financial support for material needs and the general upkeep of children (Lamb & Lewis, 2007:5; Rabe, 2007:162). A good father in the Shona culture is one who is able to provide materially for his family. Many fathers have been seen to abandon their wives and children when they realise that they cannot provide for their children financially and materially (Tatira, 2010).

In her study of fatherhood among mineworkers in South Africa, Rabe (2006) showed how economic fatherhood was a key aspect for mineworkers when describing ideal fathers in their own words. According to Rabe, financial support includes paying school fees and *lobola* for the sons. Mavungu et al (2013:70) concur and elaborate that masculinity and fatherhood came to be primarily understood in terms of being a provider of material goods and financial means and this forced men to look for employment. It is interesting to note that Mavungu et al factor in the aspect of gender in conceptualising economic fatherhood. In this regard, they argue that research has shown the long association between fatherhood and employment and this partially explains the traditional dichotomy between men's place in the public sphere and mothers' relegation to the caregiving activities in the private place of the household. As a result, it becomes of importance for this study to interrogate the *small house* woman concerning her employment status because this has implications for both the well-being of children and the social organisation of the family. It is also important to note that the emphasis placed on the provider role has been expressed in ways that reject the caregiving activities as the preserve of

the female partner (Mavungu et al, 2013:70). Thus, the traditional stereotypical perception of economic fatherhood has been a push factor for many Zimbabwean men into the diaspora, especially to South Africa, in search of employment, thereby greatly contributing to the single parenthood phenomenon in Zimbabwe. This does not mean that there are no female cross borders; it's only that the bigger picture shows that breadwinning remains largely a man's responsibility. Similarly, Townsend (2013:197) postulates that social policy and cultural attitudes increasingly emphasise financial support as a central aspect of adequate fathering, but the massive unemployment and economic crises currently prevailing in Zimbabwe make it impossible for many fathers to provide financial support to their children. In this regard, Mavungu et al (2013:70) concur and postulate that an unemployed father who is unable to provide for his family sees himself as emasculated and unable to fully assume fatherhood. Such fathers are likely to abandon their families, escaping the insurmountable responsibility of economic fatherhood.

A number of studies have revealed that women and their children are more vulnerable to poverty if fathers reject their financial responsibilities (Mavungu, 2013:76). Fathers with more than one partner and dependent children (as is the case in this study) are likely to experience more economic pressure. Given the emphasis placed on the father's role as the material and financial provider, many men buckle under this pressure or the relationship with the mother deteriorates and they end up being estranged from their children (Madhavan & Roy, 2012; Mavungu, 2013:73). This inability to provide material and financial support makes fathers feel like a failure, leading to the abandoning of the family and thereby further exposing the family to more social and economic challenges.

The economic crisis in Zimbabwe has exacerbated the prevalence of absent fatherhood, where fathers leave the country for greener pastures in the diaspora. In other words, the practice of fathering tends to be shaped by the economic context within which it exists (Mavungu, 2013:73). While cross-border migration provides opportunities for migrant men to fulfil the traditional breadwinner role in the family, it may simultaneously limit their participation in those nurturing roles which require regular contact (Chereni 2015). However, it may also be possible that the periods of absence from home, away from the spouse and children, may offer migrant men some time to reflect on their paternal involvement in the family.

In contemporary Southern African societies, including Zimbabwe, there seems to be a paradigm shift in terms of people's perceptions of conjugal roles. In this regard, Mavungu et

al (2013:75) argue that the fact that fatherhood is socially constructed also means that current and predominant fatherhood ideals should be viewed as dynamic rather than static or deterministic. In contemporary societies, women can also assume the breadwinner role, hence the need to assume symmetrical conjugal obligations. As discussed in previous sections, in colonial Zimbabwe, women's agency was demonstrated as they assumed the provider role in households when men engaged in migrant labour which attracted insufficient wages (Schmidt, 1991 & Barnes, 1992). It thus becomes important to understand the situation of a gainfully employed *small house* woman.

2.10.2.2 Social Fatherhood

There would seem to be several forms of parental responsibilities and involvement. Marsiglio et al (2008:296–297) distinguished among the paternal responsibilities for economic support, emotional support of mothers and direct interaction with children. They distinguished three forms of involvement as engagement, accessibility and responsibility. By definition, engagement involves direct interactions with children (Marsiglio et al, 2008:270). Marsiglio et al explain further that accessibility refers to activities involving supervision and the potential interaction and, lastly, responsibility is defined as the extent to which a parent takes ultimate responsibility for the child's welfare and care. Research in parental involvement seeks to illuminate the complexities around fathers' absence which is generally understood as a crisis in Southern Africa, Zimbabwe included (Madhavan & Roy, 2012). Thus, father involvement becomes an aspect of interest for understanding the complexities around absent fatherhood in the context of *small house* relationships.

A good father is often described as not only one who can provide materially and financially but also one who can socially and emotionally support the family. This brings us to the notion of social fatherhood, which involves a caring, constant presence and emotional attachment to children (Richter et al, 2012:4; Townsend, 2013:196; Pitsoane, 2014:2). In describing social fatherhood among the Batswana, Townsend (1997:407) says it is the man who acknowledges the child which is then seen by others as his child. Marsiglio (1995:9) highlights that social fatherhood can also be surrogate fatherhood. What is evident in these definitions is that social fatherhood does not necessarily have to involve biological fatherhood; other male figures in the family can assume the role of a social father. Hence, social fatherhood refers to taking child-rearing roles and responsibilities, although the father may not be related to the child biologically or legally (Morrell 2006:4). Such fathers may include stepfathers, uncles or

grandfathers who may develop a strong emotional attachment to children as a result of living together. The social fatherhood roles may also include teaching, playing, nurturing, providing guidance and spending quality time with children. Thus, social fatherhood becomes a real issue for *small house* families as they tend to be secretive and detached from the entire kinship system. It remains to be whether the absence of social fatherhood has grave ramifications for the welfare of the *small house* household.

It can be observed that Southern African cultures emphasise important and critical roles for men in the lives of children, even though the care of young children is seen as women's responsibility within a gendered division of labour and social activity. In this regard Pitsoane (2014:17) and Kimani and Kombo (2010:12) agree that fathers are perceived as the primary source of explaining basic societal rules to their sons. This is so because boys tend to be heavily emotionally involved with their fathers as role models; hence they look up to their fathers with regard to how to act out their male roles. Similarly, Yablonsky (in Pitsoane 2014: 5) argues that the amount of contact between fathers and sons determines the degree to which their personalities are influenced by the father. Rabe (2007:162) also maintains that fathers' relationships with children range in frequency of contact from regular to sporadic to no contact and fathers' experiences vary from engaged to distant to non-existent.

The concept of social fatherhood in contemporary Southern African societies tends to involve several responsibilities. Townsend (2013:196) postulates that social fatherhood also entails being close, trusted, and affectionate and emotionally supportive, and providing children with appropriate role models for adulthood. Similarly, Marsiglio and Roy (2012:193) argue that although good fathering is not monolithic and commonly includes dedicated breadwinning, a father-child relationship tends to thrive when the father is attentive and responsive to the child's assorted needs in ways appropriate to the child's developmental stage. Richter et al (2012) emphasise that the father passes social values to his children and provides the household with protection which includes shielding women and children from potential exploitation and abuse by other men.

However, a study by Mavungu (2013) in four poor communities (Alexandra, Doorknob, Tembisa and Soweto) in South Africa has shown that a significant number of fathers continue to hold traditional views about paternal roles. Mavungu observes that these fathers tend to naturalise gender roles and perpetuate old fashioned clichés in relation to male and female roles. The rigidity that comes with such often dualist and dichotomist views of gender roles

constrains adaptation to changing circumstances and wide adoption of the new fatherhood model (Mavungu 2013:75). By contrast, the evidence given by Mavungu's study tends to be challenged by the dynamism of culture and the inevitability of social change. In support of the above view, Richter et al (2012:4) elaborate that with the increasing commitment of men to their families and the wellbeing of their children, the turn of the 21st century is seeing the emergence of the 'new father', a man who is both a provider and caregiver for his children. Similarly, Richter (2006) reveals that informal observations in Southern Africa indicate that men are increasingly attending health centres with children who require immunisation, walking or driving children to and from school and providing care to them where women are employed. Thus to this effect, Mavungu (2013:67) argues that the other aspect of paternal influence involves nurturance and provision of care, moral and ethical guidance, as well as emotional support.

2.10.2.3 Biological Fatherhood

Biological fatherhood is another important type of fatherhood cherished by most Southern African societies. The term 'biological fatherhood' refers to the one who procreated the child; he may or may not be living with the family (Lamb & Lewis 2007:5; Rabe 2007:162). Concerning biological fatherhood, Marsiglio and Lamb (2008:275) observe that conventional approaches to fatherhood typically accentuate the married co-resident heterosexual father where the child is conceived naturally. In Shona traditional culture, biological fatherhood is deemed critical because it carries with it a cultural significance linked to the much revered kinship system. In this regard, Richter, Chikovore and Makusha (2013) postulate that acknowledged biological fatherhood, at least as a manifestation of lineage, is a critical element of identity development. Similarly, Rabe (2007:162) observes that biological fatherhood in itself may be deemed important and therefore has a cultural significance in various societies. In most Southern African societies children take their clan name from their father and children were even shamed for being fatherless.

2.10.3 Absent Fatherhood

Having conceptualised the three types of fatherhood, I now turn to the notion of absent fatherhood. Although the notions of non-resident fathers and absent fatherhood do not mean exactly the same, there are overlaps in terms of their implications for the household; hence literature on absent father remains relevant for the *small house* relationship. By absent

fatherhood I refer to the absence of engaged fatherhood, social fatherhood and economic fatherhood, which may impact tremendously on father involvement in the welfare of children. According to Mavungu (2013:67), in conceptualising father involvement there are various aspects such as engagement, accessibility and influence that need to be examined. In the same vein, Marsiglio et al (2008:270) elaborate that in conceptualising fatherhood, scholars have underscored multiple and wide-ranging parameters of the practice of fatherhood. Thus, absent fatherhood encapsulates lack of father involvement in the welfare of children in all aspects. In this regard, Marsiglio et al observe that the practice of father involvement can be captured in three dimensions: paternal motivation, paternal involvement and paternal influence. It remains to be seen whether the three dimensions of fatherhood are compromised by absent fatherhood in the context of *small house* households. Mavungu (2013:76) observes that absent fatherhood can exacerbate household poverty and can also have significant psychological implications for the cognitive and socio-emotional development of children. In Shona society one reason for paternal motivation could be pressure to act as masculine adult males informed by the ideals of a patriarchal system which views the man as the provider, protector and decision maker (Chereni 2010). Paternal involvement tends to comprise aspects such as engagement, accessibility and responsibility and these are critical for children's wellbeing and development.

From the discussion above it is evident that these different roles pertaining to fatherhood may be performed by the same man (Townsend 1997:407), but in certain cases different men are involved in the different aspects. For the Shona people, however, the traditional role of the father remains that of the material and financial provider – caregiving is usually relegated to mothers (Chereni, 2010).

As has already been noted, disengaged fatherhood compromises children's social and emotional stability especially the boy children because they lack a role model. In this respect, Patrick (2003:31) argues that if the father spends much time away from home, leaving child rearing to the mother, he becomes emotionally detached from his children. In support, Nyanjaya and Masango (2012) state that emotions and tears expressed during their research revealed that material support cannot compensate for the presence children expect from their fathers.

2.10.4 African Motherhood and Family Obligations

When analysing the family as a social institution, it can be observed that mothers are primarily responsible for childcare. Newman (1999) observes that mothers are regarded as carers of

children to such an extent that women are socialised into believing that having children is a primary source of self-identity. In African societies if a woman fails to bear children, the husband can marry another wife on that basis (Chavhunduka 1979:19). Rabe (2014:234) cites Hay who explains that for middle-class mothers in USA the term ‘intensive mothering’ captures the notion that children need the constant attention of their mothers and quite often the mothers set extremely high expectations for themselves.

According to Akujobi (2011:3), Africans regard motherhood as a sacred as well as a powerful spiritual component of the woman’s life. In the same vein, Chukwuma (2000:103) observes that motherhood occupies a special place in African culture and societies as mothers are seen as being central to social relationships, identities and society. In other words, from an African perspective motherhood is natural and for this reason it is special and sacred. Ngcobo, cited in Akujobi (2011:3), postulates that every woman is encouraged to marry and have children in order to express her womanhood in full. In terms of this view, a woman without children in African society remains incomplete. Mazuru and Nyambi (2012:600) elaborate that for the Shona woman to earn herself family and societal respect, she must fulfil her roles as a mother. In his attempt to illustrate the importance of African motherhood Davies had this to say:

In many African societies, motherhood defines womanhood. Motherhood then is crucial to a woman’s status in African society. To marry and mother a child (a son preferably), entitles a woman to more respect from her husband’s kinsmen for she can now be addressed as mother of ... (Davies in Eviwerhoma 2007:318).

The patriarchal nature of African society is here reflected in its preference for the boy child over the girl child. African motherhood thus takes a gender dimension as most African cultures believe that the boy child is more important than the girl child because he carries the family name (Adebayo 1996:178; Eviwerhoma 2007:318; Bourdillon 1997). By implication having girl children does not secure a mother status in the marriage and is sometimes another reason for African men to marry polygynously.

The importance and value placed on motherhood in African societies could be argued as a strong push factor for girls to marry at all costs, including polygynous marital relationships. Motherhood is so revered in most traditional societies in Africa, to the extent that it is believed there is no worse misfortune for a woman than being childless (Adebayo 1996:178; Akujobi 2011:3). Thus, for the Shona woman, marriage and mothering take precedence over everything else in their socio-cultural endeavours and it can even be said that the notion of femininity in

Africa is expressed through motherhood. Under such circumstances, women's agency tends to be expressed through their volition to attain motherhood outside marriage.

Contrary to the ideals of Western feminism (radical feminism in particular), childbearing is one of the definitive roles that Shona women proudly embrace as they regard this as a natural duty which they do not see as a form of oppression by men. Mazuru and Nyambi (2012:599) elaborate that the Shona or African mothers regard giving birth and nurturing their progeny as another way of realising their full womanhood. African mothers' beauty and wholesomeness is realised through childbearing and rearing (Eviweirhoma, 2007; Adebayo, 1996:178; Mazuru & Nyambi, 2012:559). African women tend to embrace and relish this task wholeheartedly and treasure it as a unique aspect of themselves which men can never experience. Akujobi (2011:3) adds that in the west, reproduction is subject to agreement between couples; whether or not to have children is sorted out before marriage but this is not so in Africa where every woman aspires to be a mother. To this effect, Ngcobo in Akujobi (2011:4) reiterates that the basis of marriage among Africans implies the transfer of a woman's fertility to the husband's family group. It therefore follows that although maternal ideals are entrenched in all cultures, patriarchal societies present a woman's central purpose as her reproductive function, and so motherhood and mothering become intertwined with issues of femininity and a woman's identity.

Despite the fact that some feminists in Africa concede that motherhood may at times operate in an oppressive manner (Akujobi, 2011), for the Shona, the notion of motherhood tends to be broadened as the mother's compassion is not restricted to their immediate families but also to their communities and nations as well (Mazuru & Nyambi, 2012:599). This can be illustrated by the fact that when need arises, African mothers can go to the extent of suckling other women's babies. What is important to note is that motherhood does not render an African woman powerless but actually accords her power in a marital relationship. It remains to be seen whether *small house* relationships are mediated by the desire by some women to fulfil their womanhood through childbearing and childrearing.

2.10.5 The Concept of Shona Family

Traditionally, before the advent of colonialism and Westernisation, the Shona as a people conceived of a family as *mhuri*. Ideally this *mhuri* was not quite equivalent to the Western conception of a family (Tatira 2010:13; Chirozva et al 2006:4). Tatira goes further to say that

in traditional Shona society we do not have extended family because members who are often referred to as extended family members in the modern times (usually in the English language) are in fact simply family members. Thus, in the traditional Shona conception of the family there is no distinction between nuclear and extended family; what they have is a family. In other words, when we talk of a family in Shona, we are referring to a series of families which Western societies might call extended families (Tatira 2010:13; Zinyemba & Machingambi 2014:271; Gwakwa 2014:354). It can be observed that in traditional Shona society the kinship system was closely knit and the sense of belonging was an integral part of that system.

Tatira observed that a Shona family (*mhuri*) consists of the eldest member of the clan, his brothers, their children and their children's children. In this family organisation, the surviving eldest male member of that *mhuri* becomes the head of the *mhuri* (Tatira 2010:13). If one male member of the *mhuri* decides to marry polygynously, the new wife becomes part of the *mhuri* and receives social, emotional or even material support from the *mhuri*. The *mhuri* was therefore a close-knit system of kinship that emphasised homogeneity and solidarity. It also follows that in the case of labour migrancy or death of the husband, the wives continued to receive support from the *mhuri*. For traditional Shona society, the wife belongs to the *mhuri* and not to an individual (Gelfand, 1977; Chavhunduka, 1979:20; Tatira, 2010:13). It is no wonder that the phenomenon of single motherhood or the matri-focal family was very rare in such a family set up. However, a wife in the *mhuri* received various types of support from the entire *mhuri* but not sexual gratification. This was a prerogative of the husband.

At this point, what is important to note is that the Shona people conceive a *mhuri* as a large cluster of closely knit kinship and that traditionally the family was premised on an expansive kinship network. According to Tatira (2010:14) and Zinyemba and Machingambi (2014:271), it makes no sense in the Shona worldview to refer to one's father's brother, cousin, sister or even niece as a member of the extended family because such members are an integral part of the family unit. For instance, Tatira (2010:14) explains that a grandfather cannot be seen as a member of the extended family because he holds influence and he is the foundation of the family, thus if he is removed and relegated to the extended lot, the *mhuri* becomes incomplete and ceases to function properly. It would thus follow that the concept of nuclear family is useless in this milieu since the concept of a family is more elaborate. It can thus be noted that the traditional Shona conception of family is at variance with the Western ideal type of a family. In this regard, Gwakwa (2014) and Tatira (2010:4) reiterate that what the Shona people

conceive to be family is *mhuri* which for the lack of an appropriate term can be referred to as ‘connected families’ rather than extended. Hence these connected families make up the big family which is *mhuri*.

Each family member has a role to play in the larger family; therefore there is no need to label him or her as part of the extended family but indeed as part of the family unit with specific responsibilities to undertake (Tatira, 2010:15; Mawere & Mawere, 2010:224). It should be noted that in this traditional Shona family set-up, absent fatherhood had very little impact on the family because other male members in the *mhuri* played the role of the father figure, providing both social fatherhood and economic fatherhood. However, it should also be noted that the advent of colonialism marked the demise of the notion of *mhuri* because of acculturation. Another contributing factor to the demise of the notion of *mhuri* was the economically exploitative system that was set up without any regard for African family systems. In this regard, Chirozva et al (2012:6) argue that the demise of the *mhuri* brought about by urbanisation had detrimental effects on the organisation of the Shona family. They further elaborate that the development of individualistic values which were anathema in the traditional Shona society has led to the breakup of the large traditional domestic family units. Similarly, Bourdillon (1993) argues that the rampant individualism and the weakening of kinship ties can be cancerous and inevitably affects the social organisation of the Shona family. On the same note, Tatira (2010:15) and Chirozva et al (2012:20) observe that when Western education was introduced to the Shona people of Zimbabwe, Shona culture was deliberately and systematically undermined and excluded, hence the Shona people were taught Western culture at the expense of their own culture. By implication most of the Shona norms, customs and values, including marriage practices and family organisations, were discouraged, emphasising instead the Western notions of extended and nuclear families. It can therefore be argued that because of acculturation, a wife in Shona society now belongs to the individual rather than to the entire family. Hence, in cases of absent fatherhood, the so-called nuclear family becomes vulnerable and exposed to social and economic challenges.

2.10.6 Marriage and the Notion of *Mhuri* among the Shona

For the Shona people, the concept of marriage is inextricably linked with the notion of *mhuri* and the kinship system and organisation. Marriage among the Shona people is an important phenomenon and every member of Shona society is expected to marry and raise children. According to Masasire (1996:42) and Gaidzanwa (1985:22), marriage among the Shona is said

to have taken place when two families come together and sanctify the union of two lovers. Masasire further elaborates that this sanctification comes about when the family of the male pays bridewealth to the family of the female. It can thus be inferred that among the Shona, marriage is not a contract between the two individuals but between members of two different *mhuri*. The *small house* phenomenon thus tends to contradict the Shona marriage practice as it is usually an agreement between the two individual lovers (Kambarami, 2006:2). This study thus explores the challenges brought about by such a variation in sexual relationship among the Shona people. Chavhunduka (1979:18) observes that if couples decide to stay together without payment of *roora* or without the sanctification of the union by the two families that union is derogatively referred to as *mapoto*, an equivalent of cohabitation in the Western sense.

As has already been alluded to, every adult member of the Shona society is expected to marry and once one remains single past the expected marriageable age, one is bothered by members of the *mhuri* as to why one is not marrying (Tatira, 2010:20). On the same note, Masasire (1996:42) observes that there is a social stigma attached to people who remain single beyond the expected age of marriage; hence marriage becomes a normative expectation among the Shona people. Tatira further argues that in Shona society one is never an adult until one gets married and this is evident where an elderly man or woman are called by their first names if they never marry. In the Shona cultural context, calling an adult person by their first name is a sign of lack of respect for that person. Thus, through marriage one acquires respect and dignity in the *mhuri* and the entire Shona society. According to Gaidzanwa (1985:20), marriage among the Shona is seen as the most decisive step into adulthood. She further elaborates that marriage, adulthood, motherhood and fatherhood bring status, respect and privileges to both men and women. The social status of being married automatically qualifies individuals to be addressed in the honorific plural *Va-* for Mr when referring to male members and *Mai-* for Mrs when referring to female members (Chavhunduka, 1979:22; Tatira, 2010:15). This study investigates whether the value of marriage among the Shona *mhuri* or society at large remains of fundamental importance in contemporary Zimbabwean society.

In conjunction with marriage, biological fatherhood is much revered among the Shona people. In this regard, the traditional Shona perception of sexuality emphasises that all men have the capacity to bear children; hence no man can be referred to as *ngomwa* (impotent) (Chingombe, Mandova & Nenji, 2009:2). In this context if a couple fails to bear children, the blame is usually levelled at the woman. Chingombe et al (2009) further postulate that traditional Shona beliefs confirm and affirm the autocratic and patriarchal nature of Shona society, which denies in

public the undeniable reality of men's impotence. In concurrence, Gelfand (1992) elaborates that Shona society attempts to conceal men's impotence by secretly letting in a member of the *mhuri* to bear children for him. Such a practice was meant to thwart the infertile man from knowing his impotence thereby protecting the cultural belief that all men are fertile. Such beliefs show the extent to which patriarchal tendencies are entrenched in the Shona culture.

Although the Shona people discourage their members from procreating without getting married as this brings shame to the entire *mhuri*, those who bear children out of wedlock still have a higher social status than those without children, even if they are culturally married (Chingombe et al 2009:3). For the Shona people, biological fatherhood is revered and emphasised because it is closely connected to the large kinship system of *mhuri* and their ancestral and spiritual realm (Mbiti 1975). As a result, if a woman brings a child from outside the *mhuri*, the child is usually not accepted and is usually referred to as *gora*, meaning a wild cat (Chitauro-Mawema 2003: 136). On the whole, the value of marriage, kinship systems and the notion of *mhuri* are integral components of the Shona culture.

2.10.7 The Value of *Roora* in Shona Marriage and Culture

The payment of *roora* remains an integral traditional practice and custom among the Shona people with regard to marriage. The issue of *roora* has relevance for this study because it has serious implications for the nature and practice of the *small house* phenomenon. Marriage in the African sense involves payment of *roora* or bridewealth, which is meant to legitimise the marriage (Shope, 2006:64; Mangena & Ndlovu 2013:472; Bourdillon 1997:40; Meekers 1993:35; Mawere & Mawere 2010:225). Thus, any marriage among the Shona which does not involve payment of *roora* is not credible and is easily labelled as prostitution (Bourdillon, 1997). The study thus explores the concept of *roora* in the context of *small house* relationships in Shona society.

As is the case with many African societies, the normative customs of the Shona-speaking people are characterised by the negotiation and payment of bridewealth. A study by Shope (2006) in rural South Africa reveals that bridewealth is so central to some traditional ways in rural South African communities that those seeking to alter the practice for political, social or economic purposes have found themselves mired in a contentious debate. In most cases, the Shona *roora* was paid in the form of cattle and cognisance should be taken of the fact that cattle are very much valued as a form of wealth among the Shona (Gelfand 1977). The value of *roora*

among the Shona is of great importance as it tends to be the basis for marriage and family obligations. Andifasi (in Mangena & Ndlovu 2013:473) as well as Mawere and Mawere (2010:224) observe that *roora* is an outward manifestation of the young man's love for his fiancé and is a safeguard against groundless divorce. Similarly, Chavhunduka (1979:23) and Meekers (1993:36) argue that traditionally the Shona considered *roora* as a noble custom that functioned as a safeguard against marital dissolution. In other words, *roora* acted as the glue that made the couples stick together for their entire life. A woman's father would usually not allow her to take up residence with her partner until *roora* payments had started (Bourdillon 1987:315). In a way *roora* attaches value to a woman and accords her a status. Andifasi (in Mangena & Ndlovu 2013) further elaborates that *roora* also surpassed the outward expression of gratitude by the son-in-law; it generally compensated for the loss of a productive daughter.

For the Shona, *roora* was also associated with rights over the children born to the woman (Bourdillon 1987:40; Chireshe & Chireshe 2012:213). In concurrence, Meekers (1993:36) and Mangena and Ndlovu (2013:475) argue that the payment of *roora* bestowed ownership and rights over children born by the woman to the father. Consequently, children inherited their father's name and totem and this illuminates the patrilineal nature of Shona society in particular and Zimbabwean society in general. In the Shona culture, totems (*mitupo*) are used to identify the different lineages and clans because kinship (*ukama*) is so much respected among the Shona. Usually symbols, particularly animals, are used as *mitupo*; for example the *mhofu*/eland clan. Members of such a clan are not allowed to eat the meat of an eland and may not intermarry because they are regarded as relatives (Gelfand 1992; Bourdillon 1997). If it happens that a woman and a man of the same totem marry or merely become sexually intimate, it is regarded as incest and the man is required to pay a fine in the form of a white cow for cleansing ritual purposes to the chief, the custodian of Shona culture (Chihamba, 2014:15; Mangena & Ndlovu, 2013:475; Bourdillon, 1997; Gelfand, 1992). Thus, marriage within the totem group is strictly forbidden and the notion of totem remains revered among the Shona because it is connected with their kinship system, ancestry and spirituality. It remains to be seen whether choice of partners in *small house* relationships is also influenced by the notion of *mitupo* in contemporary Shona society.

Meekers (1993) thus elaborates that a system based on bridewealth payment implies that the family groups has a vested interest in the marriage and that their influence over the married

couple is considerable. Therefore, as already alluded, the value of *roora* also confirms that marriage among the Shona is a contract between two families and not two individual lovers.

Taken from a different angle, it can be observed that the payment of *roora* creates gender inequalities and asymmetrical relations in a marriage union. Because of *roora*, women find it very difficult to initiate divorce even if the relationship is oppressive and not working. In this regard, Meekers (1993:35) and Fuseni and Doodoo (2012:3) observe that in traditional African society husbands have authority over their wives because of the bridewealth they paid. They further argue that bridewealth payment gives husbands in Southern Africa jurisdiction over women's household labour as well as their sexual and reproductive capacities. On the contrary, Shope (2006:68) observes that the payment of bridewealth in African marriages generates expectations of mutual aid and reciprocity, and it provides women with some protection against abuse and neglect. Goebel (2007:243) concurs with Shope and adds that while *lobola* has been criticised by some African feminists as wrongly used to ensure women's dependent and subordinate status in marriage, this practice also links two extended families, provides social approval of the union, and some protection for a wife from extreme abuse such as husband's failure to support her and her children. Shope (2006) further observes that, despite efforts by the colonial capital to regulate and shape the practice through customary law, the payment of bridewealth has endured and its persistence is indicative of its widespread support and its ability to adapt to a changing socio-political context. Thus as an enduring custom, *roora* offers an insight into past and present gender and power relations. According to Shope (2006), without access to alternative sources of symbolic capital, African women in South Africa's rural areas cling to the practice of bridewealth payment for the respect and dignity it confers and for the relational bonds it cultivates among families. Shope (2006:66) further argues that the African people's defence for *roora* payment draws on the same logic involved in support of individual human rights; the importance of one's dignity. In most cases husbands expect their wives to be obedient and they tend to claim their wives' labour and income. However, Meekers (1993:36) observes that nowadays women who are educated and engaged in wage labour often challenge their husbands' authority and want a greater influence in decision making. It can thus be argued that some women in contemporary Shona society have realised the inequalities brought about by the payment of *roora* and thus opt for other marital unions where *roora* is not emphasised.

The practice of bridewealth payment has endured through different historical epochs by transforming and adapting to be compatible with a given socio-economic dispensation. With colonial capitalism a new mechanism for securing resources to negotiate and formalise matrimonial ties for *lobolo* emerged in the form of a wage-based labour system (Shope, 2006:67). In other words, the introduction of a market economy dependent on migrant labour has had a tremendous effect on *roora*. The shift from cattle to cash as the medium of exchange between families has precipitated a new set of dynamics between families and between men and women (Shope, 2006:68). Shope further espouses that the symbolic meaning of *lobolo* practice that emphasises relational interdependence and respect is threatened by the increasing commodification of the practice since under capitalism, the market rather than elders, sets the pace and timing of *lobolo*. Inflating the price of *roora* tends to reduce women to commodities and at the same time the practice loses its significance. As *roora* has adapted to the capitalist economy, it has acquired more of an economic imperative as the amount paid for *roora* has increased tremendously over time (Curry, 1994; Shope, 2006:68). In the contemporary capitalist society, bridewealth payments function to redistribute scarce resources and provide the means for older generations to secure the goods that are otherwise economically unobtainable (Murray, 1981; Currie, 1994). In this context bridewealth payment plays a role in the perpetuation of capitalism and the exchange of commodities adds a redistributive dynamic to the process. Schmidt (1991:742) concurs and adds that, basing his case on a misrepresentation of African custom, the native commissioner of Ndanga in colonial Zimbabwe noted that because an African man had paid bridewealth for his wife, she was his property; hence adultery was therefore “a serious breach of the rights of property only comparable with the more serious kinds of theft”. Some women thus reject to be treated this way and opt for less formal sexual relationships.

The gradual erosion of traditional marriage customs in favour of more informal types of unions has been observed in many African societies especially among the better-educated and urban segments of the population (Meekers, 1993:35). A number of factors can be attributed to the secularisation of marriage which includes acculturation. Moreover, most theories attribute this decline in the prevalence of formal marriages to the gradual decline of the influence of the *mhuri* or lineage (Mawere & Mawere, 2010:225). Changes in perceptions of the ideal traditional Shona marriage can be linked to changes in the relative status of men and women that result from socioeconomic transformation. While inconceivable in traditional Shona society, it now happens, especially in urban areas, that couples live together without trying to

legalise their union by paying *roora* (Bourdillon, 1987:40; Chavhunduka, 1979:20). Such relationships are referred to as *mapoto* unions in the Shona society.

2.11 CONCLUSION

Gender dynamics can be comprehensively understood in the context of different historical epochs. For Zimbabwe and many other African societies, it is important to understand the evolution of gender dynamics in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras that illuminate gender dynamics in contemporary societies. In other words, gender dynamics are understood in specific historical, social, economic and political contexts. The notions of patriarchy, sexuality, masculinity or femininity also help to illuminate gender dynamics in marital relationships or informal sexual relationships. It has been noted that in Southern African societies in general and the traditional Shona society in particular, polygyny was not merely a type of marriage since it is also associated with a particular value system. The causes for polygynous marital relationships in traditional Shona society were social, economic as well as political. It should be noted that marrying plural wives was the preserve of rich Shona men and helped them further expand their wealth through agricultural activities. In other words, high economic status was both a consequence and a cause of polygyny. In this traditional society women were valued for their productive and reproductive capabilities. Polygyny was thus a symbol of status and prestige for men in traditional Shona society. For the Shona, polygyny was closely linked with their kinship system which emphasised solidarity in the context of *mhuri*. However, the advent of colonialism, Christianity and urbanisation (the vehicles for Westernisation) culminated in incompatible perceptions of polygyny between men and women in Shona society premised on tradition versus modernity. Consequently, polygyny tends to be publicly denounced by some Shona men even though they clandestinely engage in other multiple concurrent sexual relationships such as *small house* unions. In other words, in *small house* relationships men have retained the advantage of multiple relationships as was the case with polygyny. However, they rejected the openness of polygynous relationships where cowives stay together or in close proximity. They at times reject full responsibility of the *small house* family. In this regard, *small house* relationships are seen as an innovation by Shona men that enable them to move with the times. The notion of the *small house* brings us to critical issues of single parenthood, absent fatherhood and types of fatherhood as part of the dynamics of this emerging family structure among the Shona. The *small house* relationship is neither recognised by the civil law nor the customary law of Zimbabwe.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY AND AFRICAN FEMINISM

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter both social exchange theory and African feminism are discussed as the theoretical frameworks guiding the analysis and interpretation of the findings of this study. There are a number of theories that can be used to illuminate dynamics in marital or intimate relationships (commitment theory, attachment theory, structural obligation theory and the theory of reciprocal attraction among others) but for this study; the social exchange theory is applied in conjunction with African feminism to create a holistic understanding of the sociological and anthropological implications of polygynous marital practice in traditional Shona culture and the *small house* phenomenon in contemporary Shona society. This study argues that the social exchanges in a marital relationship tend to be gendered; hence African feminism is applied to illuminate gender dynamics in *small house* relationships. In this regard, African feminism helps us to understand the experiences of African women in different sexual relations and cultural contexts. However, when using the social exchange theory to analyse intimate relationships in the African context, one should be very cautious because the theory develops from European modernity which may not be very compatible with the dynamics of intimate relationships in the African context. Nonetheless, the principles of the social exchange theory tend to be more generic and in this study, they are contextualised by using African feminism to illuminate gender dynamics of intimate relationships in the African context.

The most fundamental social exchange principle is that humans in social situations choose behaviours that maximise their likelihood of meeting self-interests in those situations (Homans 1961:12–13). By implication human beings in the context of any transaction tend to be subjective and introspective. The theory thus posits perceived reciprocal interdependence between *small house* partners who emphasise contingent interpersonal transactions. For Shona society, these interpersonal transactions are mediated by the patriarchal tendencies that are seemingly entrenched in the Shona culture. In other words, the study explores the rewards or benefits and challenges embedded in the dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon. This chapter proceeds by exploring other theories that explain dynamics of intimate relationships and then the principles of social exchange theory in detail and lastly traverses to African feminism while concomitantly showing where the application of these theories overlaps.

3.2 THEORIES OF INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Although social exchange theory has been chosen as a theoretical framework for analysing gender dynamics in *small house* relationships, there is also need to acknowledge alternative theories that can be used to analyse social relationships. As a result the following theories are outlined briefly before the social exchange theory is discussed in detail: Commitment Theory, Attachment theory and the Theory of Reciprocity of Attraction. As shall be noted, these theories do not exist as discreet entities, but their principles tend to overlap with the principles of the social exchange theory.

3.2.1 Commitment Theory and Social Relationships

Commitment theory can be used to create insights into why some marital or social relationships endure while some dissolve quickly. According to Johnson, Caughlin and Huston (1999) the experience of commitment is not unitary; there are three distinct types of commitment (personal, moral and structural commitments) each with a different set of causes, a different phenomenology, and different cognitive, emotional and behavioural consequences. Personal commitment refers to the sense of wanting to stay in a relationship; moral commitment to feeling morally obliged to stay in a relationship and structural commitment to feeling constrained to stay, regardless of the level of personal or moral commitment (Johnson et al, 1999:160; Stanley & Markman, 1992:596). Thus endurance and proliferation of the *small house* relationships may be explained in the context of the Commitment Theory.

According to Johnson et al (1999), the first two types of commitment, personal and moral, are experienced as internal to the individual and are a function of the person's own attitudes and values. The third type of commitment, structural, is experienced as external to the individual and as a function of perceptions of constraints that make it costly for the individual to leave the relationship. Thus commitment to a relationship can either be internally or externally motivated.

Personal commitment, which is the extent to which one wants to stay in a relationship, is affected by three components. Firstly individuals may want to continue a relationship because they are attracted to their partner and secondly personal commitment is a function of attraction to the relationship (Johnson et al, 1999). Although these two components are related to each other, they are not exactly the same phenomenon. In this regard, one can feel a strong attraction to an individual who, in the context of the relationship, behaves in ways that one finds

unsatisfactory; for instance a woman may have quite negative feelings about the violent relationship but still experience strong feelings of love for her partner, who has convinced her that he is not the problem. The last component of personal commitment is couple identity where one's perception in particular relationships can become an important aspect of one's self concept. Stanley and Markman (1992:595) concur and add that personal dedication refers to the desire of an individual to maintain or improve the quality of his or her relationship for the joint benefit of the participants.

The other critical component of relationship maintenance is moral commitment. Moral commitment, which is the sense that one is morally obligated to continue a relationship, is a function of three components. Johnson et al (1999:161) posit that relationship-type obligation refers to values concerning the morality of the dissolution of a particular relationship. One might also feel a personal moral obligation to another person as in "I promised Paul I would stay with him the rest of my life, and I will" (Johnson et al, 1999:161). Lastly one might feel obligated to continue a particular relationship because of general consistency value. Thus marital relationships may experience challenges but are maintained on the basis of morality.

Structural commitment, also known as constraint commitment, is another aspect that may contribute to the stability of relationships. Johnson et al (1999) has argued that, although structural commitment (the sense of constraint or barriers to leaving a relationship) is an important type of commitment, its impact may not be felt as long as personal or moral commitment is high. However, if personal or moral commitments are relatively low, an individual will feel a sense of being trapped in a relationship; feeling constrained by the cost of dissolution of a relationship (Thibaut & Kelly, 1959 in Sabatell et al, 1982). A second type of constraints comes from the reactions that people anticipate from those in their network (social pressure) who may or may not approve the decision of ending the relationship (Stanley & Markman, 1992 & Johnson et al, 1999). In other words when pressure comes from people whose opinions matter, individuals may feel constrained to continue with a relationship even when they feel little personal or moral commitment. Relationships also tend to be constrained by irretrievable investments. In this regard, partners are compelled to remain in a relationship because they feel they have invested too much time and resources in the relationship. Johnson et al (1999) elaborate that some people may be reluctant to leave even an unsatisfying relationship because they feel that their departure would represent an unacceptable waste of direct investment and forgone opportunities. Another form of constraint involves the difficulty of the actions required to end a marital relationship including legal procedures to divorce

(Johnson et al, 1999). By implication, partners in a marital relationship may be forced to endure a non-working relationship because of structural constraints; hence constraint becomes the major determinant of relationship stability. Johnson et al (1999) also talks of unattractiveness of alternatives (as constraints) which represent the degree to which a person would be unhappy about any possible life changes upon the relationship ending. In contrast, perceived availability of other suitable partners may influence an individual to terminate a relationship. A woman may thus endure a relationship even when she discovers the husband is in a *small house* relationship.

3.2.2 Attachment Theory and Social Relationships

Another theory that can be used to explain the endurance and sustainability of a relationship is the attachment theory propounded by Bowlby (1982). Bowlby assumes that attachment system is active over the entire life span of individuals and underlies the formation and maintenance of relational bonds in adulthood. The proximity of attachment figures is critical in the development of a bond between partners in a relationship. Using this theory, the relationship between the *small house* woman and the non-resident male partner or between children and the non-resident father is likely to be weak because of lack of proximity. Bowlby (1988:3) further espouses that interactions with attachment figures who are generally available in times of need, and who are sensitive and responsive to bids for proximity and support, promote a stable sense of attachment security and result in the construction of a strong relational bond. To this end Bowlby observes that when a person's attachment figures are not reliably available and supportive, a weak relational bond ensues and the likelihood of establishing insecure orientations toward attachment figure increases. By implication, when the father is always absent in the *small house* family, there is likelihood of a weak bond with children and the partner.

According to the attachment theory, it is important to distinguish between close relationships in general and attachment relationships in particular; and between relationships partners on one hand, and attachment figures on the other (Bowlby, 1988:4). Thus Bowlby (1982) specified the provisions that a relationship partner should supply, or the functions this person should serve, if he or she is to be viewed as an attachment figure. First and foremost, attachment figures are targets of proximity maintenance. As a result they are expected to share residence with their partners or live in close proximity. In this regard Bowlby further argues that people tend to seek and enjoy proximity to their attachment figures in times of need and to experience distress

upon separation from them. Consequently, proximity becomes a structural constraint (Johnson, et al, 1999) that determines the nature and trajectory of the relationship. Second, attachment figures provide a physical and emotional safe haven; they facilitate distress alleviation and are a source of support and comfort. Bowlby (1988:4) therefore concludes that by accomplishing these functions, a relationship partner becomes a source of attachment security and one's relationship with him or her becomes an attachment bond. Both theories agree that proximity is an important aspect in building strong relational bonds between partners hence a weak bond develops between the father and *his small* house partner and children children.

3.2.3 The Theory of Reciprocal Attraction and Social Relationships

Eastwick and Finkel (2009) posit that reciprocity is a central feature of human social relationships. It is critical in marital relationships or even long term marital relationships like the *small house*. The ethic of reciprocity is espoused by culture and relationships would cease if partners did not routinely exchange goods, services and other benefits with one another. This theory tends to overlap with principles of social exchange theory where reciprocity is viewed as one of the key components of a stable relationship. Reciprocity of liking or reciprocity of attraction is a particular type of reciprocity that refers to the tendency for people to like others who express liking for them (Eastwick & Finkel, 2009:1333). Molmo (2010) perceives reciprocity as a function of three propositions; first reciprocity is structured, it is not just a norm, not just a process but it is a variable across different forms of exchange. In other words reciprocity is a key component of every social relationship. Secondly, the structure of reciprocity has profound consequences for social relationships, not only for exchange and power, but for the emergence of trust and solidarity. Lastly, dimensions of solidarity produce these effects through mechanisms of risk, uncertainty and conflict. In this context marital relationships or other long-term relationships, like the *small house*, are likely to endure if partners perceive their liking for their partner is reciprocated. On the whole the theory of reciprocal attachment predicts that a relationship is likely to endure if love, support and care are reciprocated. The reason I opted for the social exchange theory is given below.

3.3 SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY

Social exchange theory is one of the most influential, comprehensive and dynamic conceptual paradigms that can be applied to illuminate different marital and familial structures including informal sexual relationships like the *small house*.

3.3.1 Marital Relationships and Social Exchanges

In their application of Homans' social exchange theory of family relationships, Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005:87) showed that relationships evolve over time into trusting, loyal and mutual commitments. Thus, sexual relationships that may have started as casual or temporary affairs may endure into quasi-permanent relationships in the form of *small house* unions if partners perceive mutual or reciprocal benefits. Social exchange theory thus becomes a viable theoretical framework to examine processes in marital and familial relationships. In this regard, the theory of social exchange explains the development, maintenance and decay of exchange relationships in terms of the balance between the rewards that marital partners obtain and the costs they incur by engaging in marital relationships (Nakonezny & Denton, 2008:402). It can thus be argued that the endurance and sustainability of *small house* relationships may depend on the perceived benefits for both partners and if there is perceived disequilibrium in the social exchanges, there is likely to be dissolution of the relationship. However, because of patriarchy some relationships may continue even if the women in the relationship perceive disequilibrium in the social exchanges. Costs in marital relationships are factors that inhibit or deter a performance of a sequence of behaviours, whereas rewards are the pleasure, satisfaction and gratification that a person enjoys within marriage (Nakonezny & Denton, 2008:403; Wang, 2004:4; McDonald, 1981:826). From a social exchange perspective, it is assumed that individuals are generally rational and engage in calculations of costs and benefits in social exchanges. Most human interactions generally involve the exchange of commodities, which could be material, symbolic or affection that creates interdependence between partners and attractions to a relationship. Hence, the study explores the pleasure, sacrifices, satisfaction, gratification, pain and challenges experienced by partners in the *small house* relationship. It also explores how these experiences take on a gendered dimension and mediate the trajectory of this sexual relationship.

In their application of Homans' (1961) social exchange theory, Nakonezny and Denton (2008:402) argue that marital exchange relationships can be conceptualised as the cyclic patterns of transactions of valuable resources, tangible or intangible, between partners and such rewards and costs should ultimately be beneficial to both parties. Hence, Blau (1964:137) affirms that social exchange theory portends that individuals in relationships are motivated by the goodness of outcomes they are expected to bring. It is argued here that marital relationships,

as well as *small house* unions, involve transactions that are perceived as balanced and beneficial by the parties involved. In this regard, Homans (1961:13) and Nakonezny and Denton (2008:404) concur and add that the other basic axiom of social exchange theory suggests that when benefits from marital exchanges are perceived as equitable, there tends to be a development of solidarity within relationships. Similarly, Blau (1964:137) elaborates that the initial impetus for social interaction is provided by the exchange of benefits. Therefore social exchange theory operates on the assumption that individuals are rational and engage in calculations of challenges and benefits.

In most cases, the application of the social exchange to marital relationships has focused on the issues of marital satisfaction or the quality and stability of such relationships. Utilising the social exchange theory of Homans (1961), Blau (1964) and Thibaut and Kelly (in Sabatelli, et al, 1982), Nye (1982) suggests that the degree of marital satisfaction experienced in a dyad is reflected in the evaluative outcomes available to the parties involved. Concomitantly, marital stability is determined by the degree of positive affection toward spouses (satisfaction), the unattractiveness of alternatives to the relationship, and the constraints against the dissolution of a relationship. According to Thibaut and Kelley (in Sabatelli et al, 1982), by comparing the outcomes derived from a relationship to a person's comparative level or comparative level alternative, we get some insight into the degree of satisfaction and dependence experienced in the relationship and thus some insight into the stability of the *small house* relationship.

The theory of social exchange also seems to posit that fairness or equity is of the utmost importance in determining the degree of satisfaction a person has with intimate relationships (Sabatelli et al, 1982:3). It is argued in this study, following the exchange theory, that fairness is simply one factor that goes into people's assessments of their relationships, hence the study explores challenges experienced in *small house* unions if there is no fairness in the relationship. Homans (1961:14) suggests that rewarding interactions are the ones in which rewards are distributed judiciously. Thus, distributive justice entails individuals' subjective impressions of the amount of rewards that ought to result from a given amount of investment in a relationship.

The solidarity of a marital relationship is, however, dependent not only upon the rewards and challenges experienced in the past, but also upon the reward and cost expectations in future exchanges (Nakonezny & Denton, 2008:404). Following these observations, the study interrogates and explores the *small house* phenomenon among the Shona people, thus creating an understanding of the attractions and deterrents in such relationships. Nakonezny and Denton

further explain that the level of outcomes received relative to the comparison level defines in part the partner's degree of attraction to the marital relationship. Thus, from a social exchange perspective, each partner's attraction to the relationship is assumed to vary directly with the perceived rewards of the relationship and inversely with the perceived demands (Nakonezny & Denton, 2008:405). By implication, the partners evaluate the attractiveness of their relationship by weighing up the perceived rewards and problems experienced in the relationship. Consequently, the *small house* relationship is more likely to embody a greater degree of solidarity if both partners' outcomes and assessed benefits are above their comparison level. However, further analysis of the preceding argument reveals that in cases where individuals may not be able to execute decisions (women in patriarchal societies), marital relationships remain skewed in favour of men.

3.3.2 Social Exchanges and Alternative Relationships

Although a partner's attraction to a *small house* relationship depends on the perceived benefits received from that relationship relative to the partner's comparison level, that attraction may not influence a partner's dependence on the relationship. Instead, a partner's dependence in a relationship is a result of their comparison level. According to Wang (2004:3), Nakonezny and Denton (2008:404) and McDonald (1981:826), a comparison level alternative refers to the lowest level of outcomes that is equal to or greater than what a partner could obtain from some alternative relationship. By implication, a married man is likely to be attracted to a *small house* relationship if he perceives inadequate benefits in the original marital relationship. Similarly, the *small house* woman may look for an alternative partner if she perceives inadequate benefits from her current relationship, if any. The study thus explored the gender dynamics of the *small house* relationships and concomitantly revealing women's agency in exchange relationships.

3.3.3 Social Exchanges in Traditional Shona Polygynous Relationships

In Shona traditional culture, polygynous marital relationships involved reciprocal and mutual social exchanges which contributed to the enduring nature of such relationships. According to Bourdillon (1998:48), Masasire (1996:42), Tatira (2010:39) and Chavhunduka (1979:19), in traditional Shona societies in Zimbabwe, polygyny offered a number of advantages among spouses in such marital relationships. In other words, polygynous marital relationships were sustained and maintained by the perceived mutual benefits which were, however, male dominated.

From a man's point of view, in Shona traditional communities, wives and children provided most of the labour needed for farm operations such as ploughing, planting, weeding, harvesting and looking after livestock. There was also the prestige value of having many wives (Chavhunduka, 1979:19; Chireshe, 2012:26; Tatira, 2010:39). Since it is generally expensive to enter into a plural marriage, a man's several wives served as a measure of wealth. As explained in Chapter 2, the more wives a man had, the more society looked upon him as a man of wealth. Women's agency is reflected in their choice to marry men who had wealth to keep them happy. It therefore follows that women sought security, companionship, love and happiness in polygynous marital unions. In concurrence with Chavhunduka, Masasire (1996:42) elaborates that several wives meant several children who would translate into a reservoir of labour to work in the fields. It should be noted that the traditional Shona family was a unit of production hence the demand for labour was high.

In traditional Shona society children were also an important source of political power. Generally, men with many children and descendants were more likely to occupy positions of influence than those without (Chavhunduka, 1979:20; Jonas, 2012:2). In this respect lineages and clans were the building blocks of the political system. It can thus be argued that men gained political power through polygyny because through such a marital system they had an opportunity to procreate as many children as possible resulting in a big family. Polygyny was also beneficial to men because in times of ill health and old age a man looked to his children and other descendants for support (Chavhunduka, 1979:20). Thus, the larger the number of children, the greater was the expectations and continuity of such social support. By and large, men in traditional Shona society experienced more benefits in polygynous marital relationships than women. The study thus juxtaposes the two phenomena – polygyny and the *small house* relationship – explores continuities and discontinuities with regard to social exchanges and gender dynamics in these relationships.

Another benefit for men in polygynous marital relationships was that of sexual gratification. In this regard, some men entered into polygynous marital relationships because of the sexual outlet offered by polygyny when abstinence was demanded by the Shona culture during pregnancy and lactation (Chavhunduka, 1979:20; Chireshe, 2012:26). It was taboo for a husband to be intimate with his wife during the lactation period and the lactation period was relatively long – two to three years. Similarly, there was another traditional belief among the Shona that after menopause a woman should not continue to have sexual intercourse as this

might endanger both sexual partners (Gelfand, 1979:177; Chireshe, 2012:27). Thus polygynous marital relationships offered alternative sources of sexual gratification for men; hence polygyny from a social exchange perspective was beneficial for men in particular.

For some women, polygyny was a means of avoiding the social stigma attached to unmarried women by Shona society. Chitau-Mawema (2003:37) clearly explains that the Shona people stigmatise a woman who remains single without children and she is often derogatively referred to as *tsikombi* (a woman who has outgrown her age of marriage). It can thus be argued that polygynous marital relationships were beneficial to women in such circumstances. Moreover, in traditional Shona society domestic responsibilities were expected to be performed by women (Chavhunduka 1979:20). In the case of polygynous marital relationships such a burden was shared among the wives. When looked at in this way, polygyny may also reflect women's agency when they went to the extent of urging their husbands to marry more wives so that they did not have to bear the whole domestic burden alone. Evidence from a case study among the Shona by Chavhunduka (1979) seems to indicate that these social exchanges in polygynous marital practices were by consensus, since both partners experienced benefits from such marital relationships.

As explained in Chapter 2, it would seem that in contemporary Zimbabwean society many of the reasons for polygyny have disappeared. For instance, the need to have many wives and children for the defence of society has largely disappeared because of the absence of such wars (Chavhunduka 1979:21). The economic inability of many men to support plural wives is another factor which has made monogamy more popular than polygyny. To this end, some wealthy men argue that polygyny would divert capital from more profitable uses such as investing in business. Similarly, having several children has become an economic burden, especially in an urban setting. To substantiate the preceding point, in their study of demographic transition Caldwell and Caldwell (1987) in their wealth-flow theory of fertility, argue that a decline in fertility rates in Sub-Saharan Africa is due to children not being an economic asset in urban settings; rather they became an economic burden. In agriculture settings where human manual labour is of importance, the intergenerational transfer of wealth runs from children to parents, where children constitute a reservoir of farm labour in Sub-Saharan Africa. From a social exchange point of view, polygynous marital relationships no longer provide the essential benefits necessary for sustaining such a relationship. According to Homans (1961:14), a relationship can only be maintained or sustained if both parties involved

perceive mutual and reciprocal benefits. To this effect a Demographic Health Survey (DHS) 2010–11 conducted in Zimbabwe shows that polygynous relationships have declined to 11% from 18% in 2000. However, another argument is that contrary to views that polygyny is on the decline, the traditional Shona marital institution has transformed into secretive and subtle sexual relationships (Chingandu, 2008).

3.3.4 Sexuality and Social Exchange

The social exchange framework is also useful for understanding sexuality within a relationship context. Thus when views of the African feminist perspective are combined with principles of the social exchange theory, a more holistic picture of gender dynamics in *small house* relationships is created. Wang (2004:1) elaborates that social exchange theory focuses on what each partner gives and receives in an intimate relationship. It should be acknowledged that the issue of sexuality is very sensitive and critical among the Shona people (Masasire, 1996:44; Bourdillon, 1998:49; Chavhunduka, 1979:21). As argued earlier, perceptions of sexuality were one of the push factors to the emergence of polygynous relationships in traditional Shona society. Since polygyny is believed to give the cultural background for extra-marital relationships in contemporary society, it can be argued that such typical perceptions of sexuality have endured and may result in multiple concurrent sexual partners in the form of *small house* relationships in contemporary Shona society.

Social exchange theory illuminates why partners in *small house* relationships choose each other as romantic partners in the first place. It also allows the examination of the nature of the relationship in terms of which partner has more influence in the sexual activities the two engage in and whether or not both partners in the *small house* relationship might seek sexual activity outside their relationship.

Stereotypical perceptions of male sexuality among the Shona people make sex a very important resource in their relationship negotiations. According to Wang (2004:2), the basis of social exchange theory as applied to romantic relationships is that sex in a heterosexual community is a valuable commodity that a woman ‘gives’ to a man in exchange for other commodities. However, it should be acknowledged that while sex is seen by the Shona society to benefit men (Chitauro-Mawema 2003:138), sexual fulfilment is also a benefit sought by women in a relationship. Nevertheless, since sex is regarded as a benefit for men, for the women in polygynous or *small house* relationships compensation for sexual intimacy might be given in

the form of security, respect or items of monetary value. Explained in this fashion, sex is primarily a female resource and hence women would seek to keep the price of their resource high, while men would seek to lower the price (Wang 2004:2). Masenda-Nzira (2003:2) argues in this regard that sexuality is political and is organised into systems of power which reward some individuals while punishing and suppressing others. The study thus explores the issue of sexuality as part of the *small house* gender dynamics. Generally, as Blau (1964:138) argues, the parties involved in a relationship should perceive reciprocal and mutual benefits in the relationship; once one partner during the process of negotiation feels short-changed the relationship is more likely to dissolve. Nzira-Masenda (2003:4) further expounds that in certain present day polygynous marital unions, where women have to take turns to visit the husband in the city and only one of them visits during the winter season, it means sexuality and fertility are treated as synonymous and a woman's sexuality becomes closely related to her reproductive role as a mother. This understanding and expression of female sexuality can be considered as fundamentally oppressive to women because it restricts and curtails their expression of sexuality.

3.3.5 Marital Power and Social Exchange

Marital power is another critical resource in the negotiation of a social relationship. It is important to acknowledge that social exchange within a marital relationship involves the transfer of resources (Blau, 1964:38, Nakonezny & Denton, 2008:405). In this respect, the rewards and punishments that parties administer to each other are a principal source of marital power. It would thus follow that in *small house* relationships, just as is the case with polygynous marriages; the partner with the least commitment has more power and thus decides on the nature and direction of the relationship as explained below.

Although there seems to be mutual benefits in polygynous marital relationships, the balance of power generally belongs to the partner who contributes greater resources to the relationship, and in most cases this is the husband (Blau, 1964:138; Tatira, 2010:39.) Concomitantly, wealthy men in polygynous marital relationships had more power which at times resulted in relationship asymmetry pointing to the patriarchal nature of Shona society. In such cases, Wang (2004:2) argues that women can treat sex as a resource, while a man cannot do the same if he is in an inferior position in a relationship because men are rarely paid for their sexual services, particularly in African societies. Thus the notions of socio-economic status, marital power and social exchanges become critical when analysing trade-offs in polygynous and *small house*

relationships. Blau (1964:138) further elaborates that a partner with other comparison level alternatives emerges as the more powerful partner and mediates the trajectory of the relationship. By implication, because the husband in a polygynous marital relationship has other comparison alternatives in the form of other wives, he may become less committed to the relationships with individual wives and hence he emerges powerful in the polygynous relationship matrix. However, although the balance of power in the traditional Shona polygynous marital relationship tended to be skewed in favour of the husband, the relationship tended to be stable because women perceived no benefits in their comparison alternatives. Blau (1964:139) further elaborates that resource differential produces relationship asymmetry and that it is this asymmetrical nature of the relationship which allows for the emergence of exploitation in marital relationships. The gender dynamics of the *small house* relationship are thus interrogated, thereby creating a holistic understanding of the power imbalances between the partners involved and the impact of such power imbalances on the relationship. Generally, power imbalances in *small house* relationships may emerge when social exchanges are skewed in favour of one partner.

3.3.6 Social Exchange and Social Structures

This section explores the relationship between social exchange and social structures in an effort to create a holistic understanding of the gender dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon among the Shona people. In this respect, Cook and Whitmeyer (1992:123) demonstrated the connection between social exchange theory and social structures where they argue that humans have the capacity to create or negotiate whatever they can at any moment in time. However, Cook and Whitmeyer further argue that humans always act in a structured fashion, such that the consequences and conditions of their creativity and negotiations are patterned by relationships beyond their control. One can therefore argue that social exchanges in *small house* relationships can be seen as governing and sustaining the relationship, culminating in the formation of a new structure. Thus, *small house* relationships tend to be guided by normative constraints resulting in different role expectations and obligations for the partners (McDonald, 1998:826). These role expectations and obligations become part of the social exchanges that govern and pattern the relationship.

Although the principles of social exchange emphasise reciprocal and mutual beneficial exchanges between parties (Homans, 1961:14), further analysis of the social exchanges in marital relationships reveals that women do not seem to have much individual choice. In the

traditional Shona culture, spousal choice at times remains a family issue, where marital arrangements and conditions of marriage are negotiated at a more collective level (between the bride's family and the groom's family) rather than at the individual level (Tatira, 2014:21). The social exchanges are thus mediated by the traditional Shona family structure and normative values. Moreover, even if negotiations are at personal level, women's negotiation power tends to be regulated and constrained by the patriarchal structure, which renders them submissive, less assertive and less demanding. Shona women tend to be affected by tendencies entrenched in cultural and stereotypical perceptions of femininity (Kambarami, 2006:3). It is for this reason that many African feminists struggle against cultural and patriarchal structures that are oppressive to the African woman (Gaidzanwa, 2010) (discussed in greater detail in the next section).

For Homans (1961), social structures emerge from elementary forms of behaviour and change over time in response to the circumstances prevailing in societies. Blau (1964:112) argues further that the development of a theory of social structure can be based upon a theory of social exchange. In Blau's view, various forms of social association generated by exchange processes over time come to constitute quite complex social structures. Looking at the *small house* phenomenon emerging among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, it can be considered as an emerging family structure brought about by reciprocal and mutual social exchanges between adults in such relationships. Blau discusses phenomena such as social integration, opposition, conflict and dissolution in terms of the principles of social exchange. Such phenomena are interrogated in this study as part of the dynamics of the *small house* relationship among the Shona. According to Chingandu (2008:1), *small house* relationships usually start off as temporary affairs, which when perceived as being of mutual benefit may develop into long-lasting relationships. Thus, the *small house* relationship becomes another social structure with rules which include; that the relationship be maintained a secret, the man should be responsible for the woman's upkeep and that the woman must provide domestic and sexual services in exchange for her upkeep.

The social exchange theoretical framework effectively and comprehensively illuminates both the cultural background of the *small house* phenomenon (including polygyny) and the actual practice of the phenomenon among the Shona people of Zimbabwe. In doing so, an appreciation of the gender dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon is also made possible. In as much as normative constraints created by partners in *small house* relationships govern their

conduct and interaction, they are in turn governed by pre-existing social structures and, in this case, the Shona polygynous marital structure and gendered expectations. Thus, the pleasure, gratification, attraction, pain, conflict, punishment and acrimony experienced in *small house* relations are interrogated through the lens of social exchange vis-à-vis the perpetuation or termination of the relationship. In an effort to further expound on the gender dynamics involved in social exchanges in marital relationships, the next section explores African feminism as a refractive lens to illuminate the perceived mutual benefits in *small house* relationships. However, criticisms of the social exchange theory are first considered.

3.4 THE CRITICISMS OF SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY

The social exchange theory has a number of weaknesses especially when applied to social relationships. The principles of social exchanges do not necessarily apply to all exchanges because of restrictions created by roles and social structures. Redmond (2015) elaborate that some exchange occur because they are defined by roles and social structures in which we find ourselves. Another weakness of social exchange theory is oversimplification of human exchanges; it tends to explain human interactions only in terms of costs and rewards leaving out other factors that mediate social exchanges. Redmond further contends that because of such simplification, the theory's application to changing social values and structures becomes weak in its ability to meet the theoretical goal of prediction. One of the assumptions of social exchange theory is that individuals are innately selfish, ready to terminate a relationship where the costs outweigh the benefits (Miller, 2005). This is not always the case with relationships; relationships endure because individuals compromise on certain things.

The social exchange theory tends to place relationships in a linear structure when some relationships might skip steps or go backwards in terms of intimacy. In other words, the social exchange theory tends to ignore the complex nature of relationships and reduces them to simplistic generalisations. To this end Miller (2005) contends that when taking into account all the factors that create and sustain a relationship, such as the needs of each person, motives of staying in a relationship, the benefits each person is reaping, and the emotional and psychological factors, it would be difficult to summarise it all up in clear-cut mathematical terms. The mathematical model could be seen as heartless, generalised method for interpreting human social interaction. In this study I argue that social exchange theorists glossed over the issues of context and gender in their analysis of social exchanges. Women tend to bargain with men (who have a patriarchal orientation) as they negotiate for social exchanges in relationships.

Thus African feminism has been adopted to address issues of patriarchy and cultural context for social exchanges involved in marital or even informal sexual relationships.

3.5 AFRICAN FEMINISM

By combining African feminism with the social exchange theory, a more holistic understanding of the gender dynamics in *small house* relationships can be obtained. As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, the social exchanges in *small house* relationships become gendered as men are perceived to command more power in intimate relationships. Guided by Shona cultural ideals regarding gender socialisation, men are accorded superiority over women (Tatira, 2010:39). In this regard, the *small house* relationship becomes a typical African phenomenon since it tends to be informed by African cultural ideals such as those found in polygynous marital relationships. It therefore becomes critical to apply African feminist perspectives to illuminate the gender dynamics and social exchanges in *small house* relationships.

The situation of African women in contemporary Zimbabwean society can be best understood through African feminist lenses in the context of different historical epochs. This study thus applies African feminism to illuminate the gender discourse on *small house* relationships among the Shona people of Zimbabwe. This does not necessarily mean that Western feminism is totally irrelevant to the African gender discourse. It actually provides a basis for African feminism to fight injustices perpetuated by men in society because of stereotyped hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy (Oyěwùmí, 2004:2). African feminism only becomes more relevant as it centres on the context of the oppressed African woman. The gender dynamics in contemporary Zimbabwe should be understood through the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial historical epochs. However, the situation of African women in Zimbabwe cannot be fully understood in isolation but as it compares with other African women's historical, cultural, political and economic experiences. The conceptualisation of African feminism tends to be complicated as it tends to take diverse and often multiple trajectories. In other words, the African feminist discourse and political practice is neither monolithic nor homogenous in its analysis of gender relations in African societies. This section explores the different conceptualisations of African feminisms and concomitantly demonstrating how it compares or contrasts with Western feminism.

3.5.1 Conceptualising Feminism

Although feminism as a gender discourse can be conceptualised in a variety of ways, its major focus is to emancipate women from oppression through hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy. Smith (in Gaidzanwa, 1987) views feminism as a political theory and practice that seeks to free women of all colours, classes, abilities, sexual orientations and ages from all forms of oppression. Oyekani (2014:2) elaborates that feminism is a discourse that involves various movements, theories and philosophies which are concerned with the issue of gender difference, advocacy of equality for women, and campaign for women's rights and interests. Thus feminism can be perceived as the advocacy of social equity and equality for men and women in all spheres of life. However, for some African women, feminism is a synonym for Western feminism and therefore an alien and a cultural imperialist phenomenon (Nkealah, 2006:133; Kolawole, 2002:93; Oyěwùmí, 2004:7 & Mohanty, 1991:51). Yet, like African feminism, Western feminism may not be perceived as a monolithic movement for women; it entails a number of ideologies associated with the feminist movement (Oyekani, 2014:2). For instance, while socialist feminism sees oppression of women from the Marxist perspective of exploitation, oppression and labour, liberal feminism emphasises the equality of women and men through the political and legal reforms. Thus when looked at from this perspective, it can be argued that Western feminism as a political practice and discourse is neither homogeneous nor selective (although there is no general agreement on this). To this end, Kolawole (1997:39) elaborates that feminism is an ideological praxis that gives us a series of multiple strategies (of reading, and of analysis) and what these strategies have in common is that the woman matters. Nonetheless, many African women scholars and critics tend to uphold divergent and at times contradictory views regarding Western feminism and its relevance to African women.

In her study of the Igbo women in Nigeria, Amadiume (1987) retained the term feminism in spite of the controversy regarding to whom it refers and what is meant by it. She elaborated;

The meaning of the word as I have used it, is a political consciousness by women, which leads to a strong sense of self awareness, self-esteem, female solidarity and consequently the questioning and challenging of gender inequalities in social systems and institutions (Amadiume, 1987:10).

Although Amadiume has accepted the term feminism, she has contextualised it so that the historical, cultural as well as political and economic experiences of African women can be clearly understood. In another study of the Kenyan electorate, Kamau (2012) notes that feminism is treated with suspicion by African men and women due to a misconception of what feminism is and the association of it with the more radical stance that is most publicised. Certain forms of radical feminism may be incongruous to the African gender discourse because of the perception that it treats men as enemies and ignores the unique experiences of African women. Nkealah (2006:134) further elaborates that to most African people, the term feminism conjures a movement that is anti-male, anti-culture and anti-religion. If African women are to achieve total emancipation, such misconceptions should be corrected. Feminisms in general do not set out to denigrate men but to censure a system that unrepentantly places women's needs as secondary to men's (Kolawole, 1997, Kamau, 2012). What African feminists advocate therefore is not an eradication of culture but a modification of it, an adaption to international human rights which emancipate women to function freely within a limitless space, without trespassing on forbidden enclaves (Nkealah, 2006:139). Thus it can be argued that failure to consider context, accounts for misconceptions of the relevance of feminism in many African societies, including the rejection of feminism by some African scholars. This study thus uses the terms African feminism and African womanism (the latter will be elaborated upon below) not because they contradict the ideals of Western feminism, but because they both emphasise the historical and cultural diversity of African women's experiences.

3.5.2 Conceptualising African Feminism

As already alluded, African feminism is not a monolithic movement for the emancipation of women but a dynamic movement that acknowledges the diversity of African cultures, unique historical experiences of African women as well as the specificities of their social, cultural, political and economic conditions. African scholars have argued for the need to look at the plight of the women in Africa not through the Western lenses that may pretend to be universal, but from a uniquely African perspective in order to adequately understand the reality of the African women (Ogunyemi, 1985:65; Amadiume, 1987:8; Kolawole, 2002:92 & Nkealah, 2006:133). African feminism is thus defined as a movement by women of African origin which emphasises the unique historical, cultural, social political as well as the economic conditions of the African woman (Kolawole, 2002 & Oyěwùmí, 2004). While Western feminism focuses on some perceived generic and universal problems faced by women, African feminism deals

with the specificities and subtleties of African women's challenges. To this end Amadiume (1987:8) elaborates that if African women ignore historical and cultural differences, it will be to their disadvantage.

Since gender is first and foremost a socio-cultural construct, it cannot be understood outside of history and culture. Hence, there are several strands of African feminism because African cultures, customs and traditions that oppress women are not the same (Kolawole, 1997). In their bid to avoid the connotations associated with feminisms, some African feminists have settled for the term womanism. In this regard some African women critics have had to negotiate between feminism, womanism, stiwanism (see explanation below) and humanism as appropriate terms for the interpretation of African women's social, political and economic conditions. In this regard Kolawole (1997:13) claims that those who reject feminism as a term of reference are looking for alternative terminologies that are relevant to their specific cultural experiences and that the most dominant concept acceptable to them is womanism or African womanism. Womanism is therefore defined as the totality of feminine, self-expression, self-retrieval and self-assertion in the context of unique historical, cultural experiences (Kolawole, 1997:24). More so, African womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent and is grounded in African culture; therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles and desires of African women (Hudson-Weems, 2004:25). The African gender discourse should therefore involve both men and women in revising the oppressive African cultures. Men actually play a critical role in the emancipation of women.

On the same note, in her effort to avoid the connotations associated with feminism, Ogunndipe-Leslie (1994) developed an alternative concept: 'Social Transformation Including Women in Africa' known as stiwa or stiwanism which also attempts to contextualise the challenges faced by African women. The bottom line here is that gender discourse in Africa must take cognisance of African women's historical and cultural experiences. The problem should not therefore be situated in the naming of the different feminist movements, but in the agenda of the movements. This study has settled for the term African feminism not because the term is superior to stiwanism but because it is the most appreciated by most African feminists and at the same time it attempts to deal with the specificities and subtleties of African women's challenges.

However, despite the historical and cultural differences between women, women experience certain common gendered trajectories. In other words, in as much as it is important to understand the contextual and historical experiences of women, it is also important to acknowledge the common patriarchal tendencies across continents, hence western feminism remains relevant to understanding the situation of African women. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study African feminism is used to examine the experiences of African women in Zimbabwe, through different historical epochs (as discussed in Chapter 2). The complexities of gender dynamics in *small house* relationships render it difficult to discern and construct simplistic generalisations; hence, the application of African feminism with its multiple foci on the situations and conditions of women becomes unavoidable.

3.5.3 African women in Pre-Colonial Zimbabwe

The historical and cultural experiences of African women in pre-colonial Zimbabwe remain largely less explicit because they were not documented from the perspectives of local women themselves (as discussed in Chapter 2). Cheater (1986:68) observes that most anthropological information about women in pre-colonial Zimbabwe has been produced by men, often from different cultures and thus the subtleties of different cultures and gender perspectives become less easy to identify. However, it can still be argued that the pre-colonial Zimbabwean society was largely patriarchal as ownership of important property like land and cattle remained in the custody of men.

Cheater (1986:68) further elaborates that although women in pre-colonial Zimbabwe were economically active in agricultural as well as craft production, and had some control over grain stores, they did not control the means of production. Moore (in Goebel, 2007:239) also elaborates that historically throughout the Southern African region, women have gained access to critical resources such as land and livestock primarily through marriage. Such sentiments tend to confirm that critical resources remained in the hands of men and that marriage was very critical for women as it gave them access to important resources in society. However, it can be argued here that women in pre-colonial Zimbabwe were not totally powerless; they had control over grain stores and had access to critical resources like land, though of course through marriage. In pre-colonial West Africa, particularly in Nigeria, women's agency was reflected in their monopoly over the market place. A study by Amadiume (1987) on the Igbo people of Nigeria shows that women sold goods for men and themselves and kept some of the profit for

themselves. African women in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, particularly the Shona women, exercised authority in other roles such as mothers over their daughters and as aunts over their brothers' children (Bourdillon, 1987). In this traditional society, female authority grew with time; by the time she had acquired grandchildren, she had normally become a force to be reckoned with in most if not all matters affecting both her natal family (as *tete* or father's sister) and her husband's family (as mother-in-law) (Cheater, 1986:69). Thus although gender inequalities existed in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, women exercised some degree of authority particularly in social matters. In political issues, women remained excluded as even the elderly women did not normally frequent the male world of decision-making in the *dare* (council) (Cheater, 1986:69). This reflects that hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy remained deeply entrenched in the African culture even before the advent of colonialism.

In her study of gender relations in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, Cheater (1986) observes that the most interesting and ambiguous role of authority occupied by women in the pre-colonial period is that of spirit mediumship where women could be possessed by male spirits and were to be treated as male. Such flexibility of the Shona gender construction is what confounds the Western feminists and tend to regard it as ambiguous. Here Cheater uses the term ambiguous because she fails to understand the subtleties of the metaphysical issues embedded in the Shona culture. As discussed earlier, a study by Amadiume (1987) on the Igbo women of Nigeria reveals the flexibility of gender construction in Africa where she talks of the concept of male daughters and female husbands. Her study reveals that the male daughter and subsequently female husband had authority over their 'wives'. It must be pointed out that this was not some kind of lesbianism as the relationship between the female husband and her wives was not believed to be sexual. The institution of male daughters and female husbands placed women in a position for the acquisition of wealth and formal political power and authority (Oyěwùmí, 2004:7 & Amadiume, 1987:123). This practice reflects that the notion of gender is a social construct and becomes a fluid phenomenon as depicted in both the Shona and Igbo cultures. Amadiume (1987) thus argues that the subordination of women is not a result of imposed domestic and material roles which were valued in the pre-colonial period, but a result of the eradication of the religious means by which women gained and maintained a title allowing them control.

With reference to Shona women, Lewis (1971) observes that women who were possessed by male spirits tended to abuse their possession by such spirits to escape their standardised female

identity or to make demands on their husbands for material goods and special treatment that were not part of their normal expectations. This can be regarded as part of women's agency to free themselves from the reigns of patriarchy. Cheater (1986:69) thus concludes that religious roles in traditional belief systems afforded exceptional women, who refused to conform to the standardised female 'social personality', an escape route into individual positions of power as well as authority based on traditional religion. It can also be observed that in African cultures, women's power as female spirits was associated with rain-making. Rain is of course critical to agriculture; the source of livelihood in most traditional African societies, hence rain-making becomes a source of significant power in society (Bourdillon, 1987 & Cheater, 1986:70). Thus where female spirits controlled rain, they tended to contradict the generally perceived powerless position of ordinary women and provide an alternative model of female capabilities. In very rare instances, some women also wielded political authority as headwomen which was legitimated by spirit mediums (Cheater, 1986:70). It would appear that although some few women in pre-colonial Zimbabwe had political and religious authority, the majority of women were generally excluded from areas of secular-decision making which were reserved for men. Such a subordinate status for African women in the pre-colonial period endured into the colonial period where it was further compounded by the ideals of colonialism.

3.5.4 African Women in Colonial Zimbabwe

The colonial period in Zimbabwe and other African societies in general was characterised by a robust symbiotic relationship between traditional patriarchal systems and the structures of colonialism which further perpetuated gender inequalities in the African societies (explained in detail in Chapter 2). The subordinate status of African women was not entirely a result of cultural imperialism and colonialism, but rather indigenous and Western structures of patriarchal control reinforcing and transforming one another into new forms of patriarchal domination (Nkealah, 2006 & Schmidt, 1986). African feminism thus becomes relevant to the African gender discourse as it deals with such unique historical and cultural experiences of African women.

Barnes (1997) studied gender and pass laws in urban colonial Zimbabwe and revealed that gender inequalities were a result of the construction of the intersection of nationality, gender identity and citizenship. As discussed in Chapter 2, pass laws did not allow girls and women to stay or even visit urban areas but confined them in rural areas. Thus African feminists during colonial times, needed to address gender relations emphasising the effects and struggles around both rural patriarchies and state imposed laws and practices. As noted in Chapter 2, the

confinement of women in rural areas consolidated patriarchal powers of African men as women had to depend on men economically. In her earlier study of women's situation in colonial Zimbabwe, Schmidt (1986) observed that because of African women's agency, many a time they ran away from the rural areas and were often found in the forbidden enclaves of urban centres. Thus in their effort to regain control over their run-away daughters and wives, some African men found themselves collaborating with their erstwhile colonial adversaries (Goebel, 2005; Barnes, 1997 & Schmidt, 1986:2). By implication such unique experiences by African women in colonial Zimbabwe would thus need a unique feminist movement and in this regard African feminism becomes the ideal approach to redress the gender inequalities in society.

Although women in colonial Zimbabwe were not expected to carry with them identification cards, they were subjected to a range of measures that restricted them to rural areas and excluded them from towns (Barnes, 1993:587 & Barnes, 1997:62). When pass laws are looked at from this angle, it can be argued that they served to officially differentiate African women from their male counterparts. Barnes (1997) further argues that because identification certificates were only issued to men, they served as markers of gender difference, hence pass laws were one mechanism for the social construction of gender in colonial Zimbabwe. Barnes' work demonstrates the complex gender struggles within the African urban community in the context of changing colonial policy with regards to African women. Barnes (1993:446-447) observes that African women often "challenged the forces of patriarchy; they travelled, absconded, used the colonial courts, earned their own money and talked back to their elders".

However, it would be a huge mistake to paint African women in the colonial years as unflinchingly heroic combatants in a fight against patriarchal hegemony, as to a greater extent women remained subordinated by a combination of African cultural practices and colonial structures. What we see here is a new system of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy perpetuated and reinforced by colonialism. Amadiume (1987:9) thus argues that any work by women from so-called Third World countries (African women included), must be political, challenging the new and growing patriarchal systems imposed over our societies through colonialism and Western religious and educational influences. Nevertheless, African women in Zimbabwe continually resisted and breached such laws as they were many times seen in urban areas. In colonial Zimbabwe, women made themselves untraceable by changing names and government officials often expressed frustration with the way African women could slip through the nets of colonial law and order (Barnes, 1997:71). Women's agency is thus reflected

in their resistance to such oppressive laws and their creativeness to go round the pass laws. Gaidzanwa (1987) observes that within the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles, modern strands of feminism in Africa have emerged and developed strong movements focusing on the assertion of the rights of African women. In this regard Kolawole (2002:92) argues that the diverse historical experiences of Africa continue to shape the perception of social realities including gender and thus the many ways gender and feminism are understood by African feminists. In concurrence, Nnaemeka (1998:5) notes that it will be more accurate to argue not in the context of a monolith (African feminism) but rather in the context of a pluralism (African feminisms) that captures the fluidity and dynamism of the different cultural imperatives, historical forces, and localised realities conditioning women's activism or movements in Africa. Here the combination of colonial laws and African patriarchal tendencies created a unique subordinate position for African women in Zimbabwe which called for Zimbabwean feminism to emancipate women from oppression by men and colonial laws.

Similarly in South Africa, when pass laws were extended to African women, African women mounted the first resistance campaigns to the South African pass laws (Walker, 1982 and Wells, 1995). Furthermore, in her study of the Bakwane people of Botswana, Griffiths (1997) observes that the gender hegemony is not as seamless as it may appear; there is resistance by African women to male dominance. Amadiume (1987:9) further elaborates as she portrays the agency in African women, "we cannot afford to be indifferent scholars, glossing over the local struggles in which women in our countries are involved". The resistance by African women to the colonial pass laws reflects a new thinking about the personal and public lives of women in Africa. To this end Barnes (1997:61) observes (already some time ago) that gradually African feminists are building up a formidable challenge to androcentric studies of Africa reflecting the breadth and depth of gender structures in Africa. African gender discourse can thus be explored through contemporary African feminisms that address the emerging challenges of African women in colonial states. However, this does not necessarily mean that Western feminism is totally irrelevant; for instance, liberal feminism as one strand of Western feminism emphasises the need to uphold women's rights and accord women equal opportunities with men in all spheres of life. One would thus argue that trying to dichotomise Western feminism from African feminism is missing the point. African feminism is only more specific to the experiences of African women as it adds the cultural and historical dimensions in the African gender discourse.

The colonial government of Zimbabwe introduced acts of law that buttressed the patriarchal practices in Zimbabwe and one such act was the one that accorded women permanent status of legal minority. According to Barnes (1997:64), the colonial imposition of permanent minority status bestowed formal control of all African women on African men of the colony; as women had no direct recourse to the law in their own right. She further elaborates that under these circumstances, African men and the colonial state fitfully cooperated with each other in a new exploitation of women. Thus throughout the colonial era, an African woman had the same legal status as a child for her whole life, irrespective of her education, finances, or marital status (Barnes, 1997:64). By implication women could not have property or land in their own names; they had to be married and use the husband's name to access critical property in society. The understanding of African women's situation would thus demand examining their unique circumstances hence the existence of diverse African feminisms. In this regard Mohanty (1991:51) argues for the formulation of autonomous, geographically and historically grounded feminist concerns and strategies. It can be observed that the study of gendered identities in the colonial period in Zimbabwe has shown that, the gendered application of pass laws was an important factor contributing to new cultural understanding of the dichotomies; male/female, productive/unproductive, adult/child and perhaps significant/insignificant (Barnes, 1997:76; Cheater, 1986:71). These dichotomies were detrimental to the African women's social, political and economic situations in society. Thus unlike in the pre-colonial Zimbabwean society where African women could be heads of villages or commanded some political authority, African women in colonial Zimbabwe held structurally subordinate positions in the political economy by virtue of their permanent status of legal minority. Moreover, the fact that the subordination of African women in society cannot be entirely blamed on cultural imperialism and colonialism is further buttressed by the fact that the oppression of women in African societies did not come to an end with the breakdown of colonialism in most African countries, including Zimbabwe.

3.5.5 African Women in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe

The plight of African women continued unabated into the post-colonial era in Zimbabwe as was the case with other African countries (discussed in detail in Chapter 2). The endurance of the hegemonic patriarchal tendencies through different historical epochs in African societies serves to affirm that women's subordinate status in contemporary Zimbabwe is not entirely a consequence of colonial legacy but also of the deeply entrenched patriarchal tendencies in

African societies. In this regard, the African gender discourse calls for adaptive and contextual African feminisms that re-evaluated gender dynamics in African societies that have been historically characterised by differential treatment between men and women. According to Gaidzanwa (1987), one strand of feminism born of African women's participation in the liberation struggles was strengthened by the post conflict marginalisation of women who were excluded from post-colonial armies, employment and the economy because of their lack of education. Hence African feminism reacted to the devaluation and misrepresentations of various African cultures and traditions by colonialists and focused on re-capturing and re-valorising African traditions and cultures by writing about famous and powerful African women such as Nehanda of Zimbabwe, Nzinga of Angola and Nongawise of the Xhosa in South Africa (Gaidzanwa, 1987). To this end, Gaidzanwa further elaborates that tendencies within feminisms in Africa raised issues relating to customs and traditions that undermine African women's land and property rights. It can thus be argued that because of the perceptions on hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy, African women in Zimbabwe continue to experience gender based violence, inequalities in education, health, economic and political power. This study thus explores gender dynamics in *small house* relationships as men's dominance in marital and other sexual relationships tends to be perpetuated and reinforced by historical and cultural expositions in Zimbabwe.

A study on Zimbabwe's FTLR by Goebel (2002) reveals that women were excluded in the redistribution of land, which is a crucial resource for livelihood. To this end Goebel observes that the contradictions between customary law, practices, attitudes and modern individual rights represent a complex battle ground for women and land in Southern Africa, and calls for new feminist conceptualisations of the state as a vehicle for gender justice. The FTLR in Zimbabwe continues to privilege men as beneficiaries of resettlement land as traditional authorities in reform process tend to marginalise women. As was the case during the colonial era in Zimbabwe, in the post-colonial era we see the combination of traditional practices and state policy in perpetuating the subordination of African women. McFadden (2002) observes that the hostility towards women by the state has meant that women's activism in Zimbabwe has been predominantly and increasingly located outside the state in civil society and international feminist networks and support have become crucial to the vibrancy of the struggle for gender justice. As a result of the realisation that the Zimbabwean state had reservations in terms of allocating land to women, the Women and Land Lobby Group (WLLG) was formed in 1998 by Zimbabwean women activists who were committed to the land issue (Goebel

2002:146). Thus African feminism on top of its approaches that deal with the historical and cultural experiences of African women, should also lobby for political and legal reforms (similar to the ideals of liberal feminism) that address problems faced by African women in the post-colonial society.

Despite the centrality of women's roles in farming and food security, and the importance accorded to women's access to land among women's groups and feminist academics in Zimbabwe, the state remains adamant and continues to exclude women in accessing critical resources such as land. Cheater and Gaidzanwa (1996:200) quote the erstwhile head of state of Zimbabwe saying, "If women want property then they should not get married." Such a statement creates a dilemma for many African women as marriage remains a revered institution in most African societies. Women's access to important property in society should not be conditional because women, just like their male counterparts, have full entitlements to their rights. The sentiments by the former head of state of Zimbabwe reflect deeply entrenched patriarchal tendencies in society which are then reinforced by state policies in contemporary African societies. As discussed in Chapter 2, women's access to land has been historically mediated through male entitlement and control through the institution of marriage and the allocative powers of traditional authorities (Gaidzanwa, 1987 & Goebel, 2005). Similarly the resettlement policy in Zimbabwe maintained the approach to land distribution which is commonly associated with the Shona custom, which prevents married women from gaining access to land in their own right (Goebel, 2005:147). To this end Kerby (1999) comments that the relations between land and tradition are profoundly about the construction and reconstruction of masculinity. Lack of access to important resources like land may compromise women's economic position and hence weakening their bargaining power in marital or sexual relationships. Goebel (2005:154) thus argues that the promotion of women's rights to land therefore cannot be only a political project of the state but must also incorporate the insight that such a promotion is a profound challenge to a living cultural tradition that understands land as the key element of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy. African women in Zimbabwe thus tend to be confined and subordinated by the interplay between politics and tradition.

As has been already alluded, in colonial times, as a result of 'custom' and colonial state policy, women's mobility was curtailed and they had no rights to own property in their names (Schmidt, 1986 & Barnes, 1997). The endurance of this legacy in post-colonial Zimbabwe is evident in the treatment of female cross border traders who undergo serious scrutiny before

they are given the necessary visas. Women's economic opportunities are thus further emaciated, thereby exposing them to exploitation by men as they tend to depend economically on men.

The patriarchal nature of the post-colonial state is further portrayed in citizenship policy as expressed in the 1984 Citizenship Act. According to this policy, Zimbabwean men who marry foreign women can transfer their citizenship to their wives but women who marry foreign men cannot do the same (Goebel, 2005: 155). By implication, the notion of citizenship in Zimbabwe reflects patrilineal patterns of Shona culture from the men's perspective. Cheater and Gaidzanwa (1996) further espouse that the citizenship policy not only violates women's equality rights, but also imposes an androcentric view of culture as women's bilinear experience of rights and obligations are violated through the policy that recognises only uni-allegiance along patrilineal lines. In this regard, Goebel (2005) argues that what is demonstrated very clearly here is that struggles about culture are profoundly struggles about gender, including both feminine and masculine identities and entitlements. It is observed here that the situation of women in post-colonial Zimbabwe is quite complex and thus calls for more vibrant feminist movements. In her study of the FTLR in Zimbabwe, Goebel (2005) applies a feminist materialist perspective as informed by post-structuralist analyses. Feminist structuralists view reality as socially constructed and that it is regulated through contextualised discourse (Kamau, 2012). According to the feminist structuralist perspective, women can no longer be viewed from the negative eyes of patriarchal systems and they should not be treated as 'other' but part and parcel of the main (Kamau, 2012). By implication the 1984 Citizenship Act should be repealed and feminists in Zimbabwe should fight the institutionalised patriarchy and convince men to join the struggle to emancipate women. Goebel (2005) further argues that the Zimbabwean experience indicates the centrality of the conflict between African customary practice and a modern rights-based legal framework in relation to women's land rights. As already argued, the varying strands of modern African feminism should redirect their attention to legal reforms to emancipate women from institutionalised patriarchal tendencies.

This study explores the *small house* phenomenon in contemporary Zimbabwe now characterised by an economic crisis where the formal industry has transfigured into informal industry. African women's agency in this new economic dispensation is reflected by their effort to participate in the informal industry through selling some wares and providing catering service to workers in the informal industry. The economic crisis in Zimbabwe has had ripple

effects on social life including high rates of marital discord and high frequency of multiple sexual partnerships as a result of labour migrancy which separates couples (Barnes, 1997 & Goebel, 2005). African feminism thus becomes appropriate to illuminate the African gender discourse as it deals with the subtleties and specificities of African women's reality (Kolawole, 2002: 96). It is against this background that the study on *small house* relationships adopts African feminism to illuminate the gender dynamics in such relationships.

Although the situation of women in the contemporary Zimbabwean society remains subordinated, there have been some relative improvements in terms of accessing resources that were previously regarded as a preserve for men. The varying strands for African feminism have been instrumental in shifting the terrain of political, social and economic struggle in Africa, bringing together issues of the public and private spheres to move forward the agenda of human rights on the continent (Gaidzanwa, 1987). Thus gender dynamics in *small house* relationships can be best understood through the lenses of African feminisms that attempt to historicise and contextualise the experiences of Zimbabwean women in general and the Shona women in particular.

3.6 CONCLUSION

The social exchange theoretical framework is of salient importance when analysing the dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon. It helps in illuminating marital relationships and social trade-offs, as well as alternative relationships vis-à-vis current marital unions. Issues of sexuality and social exchanges, marital power and social exchanges, as well as social exchanges and social structures are understood more clearly through social exchange theory. However, the social exchange theory tends to oversimplify and generalise the social exchanges involved in social relationships hence this study incorporates African feminism into the theoretical framework. African feminism offers refractive lenses to further illuminate the gender dynamics in *small house* relationships. By implication, social exchange theory and African feminism complement each other in illuminating the gendered social exchanges in *small house* relationships. As partners bargain for exchanges in a relationship, their choice and bargaining power tend to be influenced by perceptions on sexuality, patriarchy, femininity and masculinity as embedded in the African culture.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter explains the qualitative research approach that was adopted by the study. For this research, qualitative research was deemed to be best suited for gaining an in-depth understanding of the *small house* phenomenon among the Shona ethnic group in Zimbabwe. The Chapter thus describes in-depth interviews as the main data collection method used, the research population and the sampling techniques applied, including purposive and snowball sampling. A detailed account of how the fieldwork was conducted is also given. An overview of the sample in terms of the characteristics of the participants, including their social status, is also given. The study concentrated on the perceptions of individuals with direct experiences of *small house* relationships. The Chapter also describes the data presentation, analysis and interpretation techniques. The relevance of ethical considerations is explored in detail with specific focus on the research ethics that were observed in this study. Importantly, issues of data validity are also discussed in this Chapter; the trustworthiness of the collected data was assured by revisiting some of the research participants to check the validity of the data obtained and to explore issues that needed further clarification. The Chapter closes by summing up key aspects of the qualitative research paradigm.

4.2 METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

In this study, the social exchange theory was complemented by African feminism to illuminate the social and gender dynamics that are typical in *small house* relationships. The combination of the two theories helps to understand why such relationships seem to endure and why they seem to have proliferated among the Shona people of Zimbabwe. Since the *small house* phenomenon is seen to be a social structure created by social actors, the adoption of a qualitative research approach is justified to explore the actions of men and women in *small house* relationships.

Although the main source of data was in-depth interviews with men and women in *small house* relationships, I also made observations with regard to the context of the interviews. In other words, during the interviews that were conducted in the participants' homes, I made observations about the household contents to ascertain the socioeconomic status of the research

participants. For example, in one instance I was given some bricks as a stool to sit on. The fact that there was no chair in the house was obviously a sign of poverty. Similarly, for the interviews that were conducted at workplaces, I assessed the nature of the job and/or the business activities to confirm the socioeconomic status. Thus, the qualitative research approach was justifiably adopted.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, the study employed a qualitative research design to guide the process of collecting, presenting and analysing data on the *small house* phenomenon. Qualitative research is usually informed by the interpretivist paradigm. As a research paradigm, interpretivism allows an in-depth exploration of the experiences, attitudes, feelings and perceptions of the research participants on a given phenomenon (Neuman 2014:51). In this regard, the study adopted qualitative data collection methods in the form of in-depth interviews conducted in the Harare metropolitan province. The study also adopted a purposive sampling technique to reach 30 research participants with direct experiences in *small house* relationships. An interpretive analysis model was employed to assist in establishing emerging patterns or themes from the collected data. Lastly, the analysis and interpretation of data was informed by social exchange theory and African feminism to understand the gender dynamics in *small house* relationships.

4.3.1 Research Paradigm

Interpretivism is a research paradigm which is based on the belief that reality is socially constructed during interaction and that the goal of social researchers is to understand what meanings people give to that reality (Neuman 2014:51). In other words, the researcher sought an in-depth understanding of the experiences, attitudes and feelings of men and women in *small house* relationships. Specifically, the study explored the reported experiences of the adults in *small house* relationships as well as their portrayals of their children to obtain a deep understanding of this phenomenon in Shona culture. Of great interest was the welfare and education of children growing up in the context of *small house* households. Denzin and Lincoln (in Gall et al, 2007:31) and Patton (2007) maintain that qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to make sense or interpret the phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Although the *small house* phenomenon tends to

be created by social actors, as a social structure it has been seen to constrain and determine the social behaviour of those involved in such relationships.

As already indicated; the study made use of qualitative data collecting methods in the form of in-depth interviews to allow for the creation of a comprehensive picture of the social and gender dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon. The in-depth interviews helped to capture the social life of the participants as they experienced it and at the same time allowed for the interpretation of the meanings attached to certain actions and practices by the participants (Schutt 2009:17). Thus, in-depth interviews allowed for the collection of relevant and trustworthy data from *small house* couples with first-hand experience of such intimate relationships.

4.3.2 Population and Sampling

The study on the *small house* phenomenon was conducted in the Harare metropolitan province. Although it was difficult in this study to identify a specific research population, the study assumed that all those engaging in *small house* relationships in Harare constituted the population of the study. Since it was not possible to include every *small house* case in this province in the study, I adopted a purposive sampling technique to locate participants. In some instances, I used a snowball sampling technique where I requested some of the men in *small house* relationships to introduce me to their partners or other people in similar relationships. The use of this sampling technique was necessitated by the delicacy and secretive nature of the *small house* relationship which made it very difficult to access research participants.

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method in terms of which participants are selected for a specific purpose, usually because of their unique position, experience and knowledge (Baxter & Jack, 2008:9; Cohen et al, 2007:114). Patton (2007:181) adds that the thrust of purposive sampling is to identify information-rich sites. By implication, I selected men and women in *small house* relationships because of their direct experiences of such relationships. By doing so, I gained access to first-hand information on the background to the development of the relationships, reasons for engaging in such relationships, gender dynamics, the social exchanges involved, the welfare and educational challenges of children growing in the context of *small house* households and other experiences relevant to such relationships.

Thus, through purposive and snowball sampling I was able to identify 30 research participants (17 men and 13 women) who were directly involved in *small house* relationships. The sample comprised three ‘couples’ and the rest were individuals in *small house* relationships who

wanted their partners to remain anonymous, thus confirming the secretive nature of such relationships. It is also important to note that eight of the 30 participants refused to be audio-taped so I had to rely on note taking to capture the data. It was also very difficult to convince female *small house* participants to introduce me to their partners. In fact, there was not one woman in a *small house* relationship who agreed to introduce me to her partner. Again, such behaviour shows the typical delicacy and secretive nature of *small house* relationships.

4.3.2.1 Gaining Entry

Although *small house* relationships are not acknowledged by Shona society, those in such relationships are known. The *small house* relationship is treated with some degree of secrecy by those parties involved and it is a difficult target population to penetrate in order to carry out a study. As a starting point, I located people who could introduce me to men and women in *small house* relationships. After explaining the purpose of my study to them and assuring them of privacy and confidentiality, I would then engage them in interviews. After the interviews, I would ask the participants to introduce me to their female partners. In this regard, I succeeded three times with male participants; the rest opted to have their partners remain anonymous. In this way, people accepted me as a researcher and volunteered critical information about issues surrounding the *small house* phenomenon.

As already alluded to, gaining entry to the research field was a daunting task as several prospective research participants lacked interest and were reluctant to be interviewed. This was not surprising considering the delicacy and the secretive nature of *small house* relationships. Some prospective participants suspected that I wanted to publish a book on the *small house* phenomenon that would reveal their names and their extramarital relationships. As anticipated, five men and eight women in *small house* relationships declined to participate in the interviews, in spite of the fact that I assured them that they would remain anonymous. Other prospective research participants suspected that I was a reporter with the *H-Metro*, a very popular newspaper in the Harare metropolitan province which specialises in marital relationship issues, particularly cheating and infidelity.

Some men and women in *small house* relationships would agree to be interviewed, but the moment I indicated that I was going to record our interview they would refuse. At times, even if I indicated that we could proceed without recording the discussion, some would still refuse. At one point I was asked to replay the recorded interview by a male participant and, after

listening to the discussion we had had, he instructed me to erase the whole discussion. In yet another incident, Gararirimo (a pseudonym), a businessman, agreed to be interviewed but threatened to cause trouble if the conversation appeared in *H-Metro*. He then demanded my mobile number before we started the interview. Having set the terms and conditions of the interview, he told his story reluctantly and boastfully.

I had to have someone introduce me to a potential participant and I relied on those who volunteered information, to refer me to others – snowball sampling. I continued with this approach until I reached data saturation, at which point no new information was revealed.

4.3.2.2 Characterisation of the Research Sample

Participants in the research study included a cross section of social classes in the Harare metropolis. The majority of participants were self-employed in the informal sector. Participants in the study can be categorised as follows: one teacher, one truck driver, one technician, one businessman, two soldiers, one police officer, one secretary, one accountant and the rest were either self-employed or unemployed. It is important to note that of the 13 women who were interviewed, only two were formally employed; one as a soldier and the other as a secretary with a company in Harare. Most of the women in *small house* relationships were either selling some wares or were fulltime housewives. Of the 17 men who were interviewed, only seven were formally employed and the rest were self-employed or unemployed.

At the entry point of the *small house* relationship, most men were financially stable. The majority of the research participants reside in the high-density suburbs of Harare and the dormitory town of Chitungwiza. Only three of the participants resided in the low-density suburbs of Harare. This does not suggest that the *small house* phenomenon is less prevalent in low-density suburbs, but the accessibility of such participants was even more of a challenge. The composition of the sample depicts the patriarchal nature of Shona society, where men's stereotypical role is that of a financial provider while women depend on men for their survival. The low socioeconomic status of some women may explain why they may end up in potentially exploitative sexual relationships, as is often the case with *small house* relationships.

In terms of education, nine of the 13 women had attended secondary school but of these, only four were able to complete their secondary education and one had a post-school ordinary level education. The remaining four had dropped out at primary school level. Of the men, 16 out of 17 had attended secondary school while only one had dropped out at primary school level.

Three men had post-school level education. Although the educational level of the research participants can be described as moderately good (in this context), the support of children's education in Shona society tends to take a gender dimension where the girl child is less privileged. This partially explains why some women in *small house* relationships depend on men for their livelihood.

The ages of the female participants ranged from 26 to 46 years and the majority of them were above 35. Of the 13 women, 10 had children in the *small house* relationship and 6 had been previously married. The men's ages ranged from 32 to 53 and the majority were above 40. Of the 17 men 12 had children in the *small house* relationship. It was also observed that there were wide age differences between partners in *small house* relationships. Such age disparities between partners in *small house* relationships are a manifestation of the stereotypical belief in African societies that male sexual virility can be satiated by young women (Zeitzen 2008) and may explain why men seek the attention of another younger woman.

4.3.3 Data Gathering Methods

Although obtrusive observations of the interview context (either at home or the workplace) were made, the main method for collecting data was in-depth interviews. Data collection was done throughout 2016 and part of 2017.

4.3.3. 1 In-depth Interviews

The study utilised qualitative data gathering methods in the form of in-depth interviews to collect data on the *small house* phenomenon. According to Lefland and Lefland (in Schutt 2009:315) and Cohen et al (2007:228), in-depth interviewing is a qualitative method which involves open-ended, relatively unstructured questions in which the interviewer seeks in-depth information on the interviewees' feelings, experiences and perceptions of a given social phenomenon on their own terms and in the context of their situation (see interview schedules in both languages in Addenda 3, 4 and 5). This study adopted in-depth interviewing to collect critical information on women's agency, the social exchanges and gender dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon by probing the partners' experiences, challenges and reasons for engaging in such a union, as well as the welfare and educational challenges of children growing up in such contexts and the partners' feelings about their situation.

In-depth interviewing helped to elicit life narratives especially from the *small house* women on the circumstances that led them to engage in these relationships. Such life narratives helped to create a comprehensive picture of the *small house* partners' socioeconomic background, feelings, attitudes, social exchanges, perceptions and social behaviour in their natural setting. Since interviews are a form of face-to-face interaction which involves no structured or semi-structured questions, it allowed me opportunities to probe for challenges, social exchanges and other experiences in *small house* relationships. It also allowed me an opportunity to make observations in the context of either the home or workplace of the participant. In doing so, an in-depth picture of the *small house* phenomenon revealed itself. Since no children were interviewed, the study relies on the parents reporting on their children's behaviour and experiences.

The interviews were conducted in Shona, the language best understood by the research participants, and were tape-recorded or detailed notes were taken (as described above). The tape-recorded data were then transcribed and translated into English.

4.3.4 Data Presentation and Analysis

After collecting data from the in-depth interviews which were all recorded using a voice recorder, I transcribed the data and translated the responses from Shona into English. Collected data were presented as thick descriptions in the individual responses of men and women in *small house* relationships. The study adopted an interpretive analysis model which helped in establishing emerging patterns or themes from the collected data. Gall et al (2007:466) and Cohen et al (2007:86) describe interpretive analysis as the process of examining a case study closely in order to find constructs, themes and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied. In this regard, data for individual *small house* relationships were segmented and categorised into the follows themes; cultural background to *small house* relationships, *the small house* as an alternative route to motherhood, challenges and social problems in *small house* relationships, Absent fatherhood, socialisation and schooling, *small house* children's schooling experiences and Educational preferences according to gender . A segment refers to a meaning unit or an analysis unit and a category is a construct that refers to a certain phenomenon (Gall et al 2007:466-467). I therefore coded corresponding segments in the different *small house* cases using numbers. Segments with a corresponding code formed the emerging pattern or theme from the data. Such a presentation created a holistic appreciation

of the *small house* phenomenon. Although the initial interview guide had pre-set themes, these at times had to change as new themes emerged during the course of the interviews.

After segmenting the data into the respective emerging themes, I returned to fieldwork for follow-up interviews. This second round of interviews was very difficult as it was met with much resistance by the participants. Only six participants agreed to a second round of interviews, the rest were either difficult to locate or openly declined to be re-interviewed. However, data collected from these participants were valuable in augmenting the data obtained during the initial interviews. The resistance by participants was not surprising considering the delicacy and secretive nature of the phenomenon under study. Analysis and interpretation of data was informed by the relevant conceptual framework, social exchange theory, and where gender dynamics were at the centre of the *small house* relationship, African feminism was applied to further illuminate the nature of the relationship.

4.3.5 Trustworthiness in Research

One of the central concerns of qualitative research is to generate research findings that are trustworthy. In this regard, qualitative researchers are expected to pay attention to issues of trustworthiness. The concept of trustworthiness is defined by Holloway and Wheeler (1996: 162) as the extent to which research findings represent the reality of the people or other entities under study. The study adopted Lincoln and Guba's (1985:112) model which identifies the following four criteria for establishing trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

4.3.5.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which research findings approximate reality and are judged by the research participants as a reflection of their lived experiences (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985:203; Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). In concurrence, Anney (2014) espouses that credibility establishes whether or not the research findings represent plausible conclusions drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views. The credibility of this study was enhanced through member checks and asking questions that cross-checked each other. Baxter and Jack (2008:555) describe member checking as a process where researchers' interpretations of the data are shared with research participants and the participants have an opportunity to discuss and clarify the interpretations. Member checks are regarded as "the most critical technique for establishing credible qualitative research" (Lincoln

& Guba 1985:314). Creswell (2009:191) concurs and adds that member checks mean that data and interpretations are continuously taken back to the research participants for verification, corrections and additional information. Thus, I had to conduct follow-up interviews with some participants to clarify their initial responses to questions on their experiences in *small house* relationships.

4.3.5.2 Transferability

Bitsch (2005:85) defines transferability as the extent to which research findings are applicable in other contexts with similar conditions. This means that research findings are transferable only if they fit into new settings outside the actual study context. The transferability of research findings is enhanced through purposive sampling and thick descriptions (Bitsch, 2005: 85). Rich information sites as well as rich informants were purposively sampled for detailed study as explained under sampling. By doing so, I increased the transferability of data on gender dynamics in *small house* union to other contexts with similar circumstances.

4.3.5.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to “the stability of findings over time” (Bitsch, 2005:86). The same view is expressed by Daymon and Holloway (2002:94) who assert that, research findings are dependable if they are consistent and accurate over time. This means that if a study were repeated in a similar context with the same participants, the findings would be similar. The dependability of this study was enhanced through member checks, thick descriptions, purposive sampling as well as mechanical recording of data. Tape-recording the interviews allowed me an opportunity to replay the taped interviews as many times as I needed to capture and interpret the data accurately. In doing so, a holistic and comprehensive picture of the *small house* phenomenon was created, giving a true reflection of the social and gender dynamics of *small house* relationships among the Shona people of Zimbabwe.

4.3.5.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is concerned with establishing that “data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer’s imagination, but are clearly derived from the data” (Tobin & Begley 2004: 392). By implication, confirmability is attained when research findings are free from the value judgments, prejudices and biases of the researcher. Krefting (1991:218) proposes researcher reflexivity as a strategy for enhancing confirmability. In tandem with this view, I declared my assumptions on the research problem in Chapter one and also made them

known to the research participants. Throughout the study, I made sure that my assumptions did not interfere with the findings of the study. This was achieved through regular member checks and by asking questions during interviews that cross-checked each other to maintain and enhance confirmability. On the whole, trustworthiness of data on social and gender dynamics in *small house* relationships was achieved through complementary data collecting methods, mechanical recording of data, purposive sampling as well as member checking.

4.3.6 Researcher Reflexivity

Being a male researcher posed a challenge in accessing information on sensitive issues from especially female participants who felt uncomfortable about a male researcher undertaking research on women's experiences in *small house* relationships. It became apparent that our identities as male/female can crucially affect the openness of the interview. Issues of sexuality are highly secretive among African cultures especially when it involves people of opposite sexes (Uchendu, 2008); hence women in *small house* relationships were reluctant to talk about sexual matters concerning their relationships. However, being an outsider and a stranger to the research participants allowed the participants to share information relatively freely and also, with much patience and further probing, some of them opened up after they realised that I was empathetic to their situation. More so, some men in *small house* relationships were not free to allow me interview their partners as they perceived me as a potential suitor. To improve the interaction process I established sufficient rapport to discuss sensitive issues regarding the secretive *small house* phenomenon. This was achieved through explaining the reasons for the study and empathising with their situation. Being a Shona myself, and studying a Shona cultural practice helped me to have a deep understanding of the gender dynamics in *small house* relationships. Though this may result in subjective data compromising the realities of experiences in *small house* relationships. The *small house* phenomenon tends to cut across all social classes and in cases where I interviewed men of my own social class; I had great appreciation of how difficult it is to support two different households especially in urban set-ups.

4.3.7 Ethical Considerations

This section discusses the research ethics that were observed during fieldwork. Ethics in research involve considerations such as fairness, honesty, respect for the integrity of individuals and the confidentiality of certain information (Schutt, 2009:72). Ethical clearance was given by the Unisa Ethics Committee (see Addendum 1). The study sought informed

consent from research participants and the informed consent form was completed by the participants. In this regard before every interview I explained to the participant the purpose of the study, its benefits to society and how long each interview would take. I also explained that participating in the interviews was entirely voluntary and that participants had the right to withdraw at any stage. Out of 30 participants, eight refused to be audio-taped and I respected their decision as it was their right to do so.

Since *small house* relationships tend to be unacknowledged by Shona society, it was very important to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of the participants, especially those directly involved in these relationships. This was the most sensitive ethical issue; participants wanted convincing assurance of the confidentiality of the information given and those who declined to participate in the interviews did so because they were not convinced regarding the confidentiality of the information they would give. To protect the anonymity of research participants, I used pseudonyms for the participants.

I also ensured that the interviews did not result in psychological stress for the research participants by creating rapport and being empathetic with their situation. This approach assisted in creating a friendly atmosphere in which the participants opened up, thereby divulging critical and sensitive data on the *small house* phenomenon. However, I must admit that one woman broke down as she was narrating her ordeal and the challenges experienced in the *small house* relationship but she was quick to recover and continued with her narration. During the fieldwork, five men and eight women declined to be interviewed and this underlines the fact that nobody was coerced into the study, hence the principle of voluntary participation was observed.

4.4 CONCLUSION

This Chapter explored the methodological orientation and the qualitative research design adopted by the study. It clearly articulated how the participants were selected, the way the interviews were conducted as well as the fieldwork challenges that were encountered. The composition and characterisation of the sample was described in detail. It consisted of men and women who had direct experiences of *small house* relationships. Data presentation and analysis approaches were explained in detail and issues related to the validity and trustworthiness of the data collected were also clearly articulated. Lastly, the research ethics observed during the fieldwork were discussed. The next three Chapters respectively present, interpret and analyse the collected data in emerging themes and as guided by the research questions and informed

by the social exchange theory, as well as African feminism, so as to create a comprehensive appreciation of gender dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon.

CHAPTER 5

THE *SMALL HOUSE* RELATIONSHIP: A CONSEQUENCE OF THE SHONA'S REVERENCE FOR MARRIAGE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The polygynous marriage practice among the Shona people of Zimbabwe was greatly cherished and regarded as a manifestation of the Shona value system as pointed out above. Prior to colonisation and subsequent Westernisation, polygyny as a marital practice was seen to be compatible with the political, social and economic dispensations of the time. This Chapter explores the continuities and discontinuities of polygyny in a different socio-economic and socio-political context among the Shona people. In doing so, it explores the perceptions, experiences, attitudes and feelings of men and women who are directly involved in *small house* relationships in contemporary Shona society. Participants' perceptions of the *small house* phenomenon are analysed using social exchange theory as a theoretical framework. Since the study explores intimate relationships in an African context, African feminism is also used to illuminate the gender dynamics in the context of *small house* households. Using the findings of the study, polygyny is juxtaposed with the *small house* relationship to uncover if links exist. The complexities of the *small house* phenomenon is such that it may not be perceived as an imitation of polygynous practices but as another sexual relationship emerging in the 21st century in tandem with the socio-cultural and socio-economic dispensation. This then leads to the analysis of the reasons for *small house* relationships in the contemporary Shona culture. The Chapter closes by analysing perceptions of the value of *roora* in Shona marital practices in general, as well as in *small house* relationships in particular.

Of the 30 participants, 11 indicated that their families of orientation were polygynous. Although practised by the few rich men, polygyny was a common and robust marital practice among the Shona people of Zimbabwe so it is no surprise that polygyny has endured the changing times and circumstances. However, both polygyny and the *small house* phenomenon remain a contested terrain among men and women in contemporary Shona society. This Chapter therefore addresses the following research sub-question:

Is the *small house* phenomenon based on patriarchal traditions associated with polygyny in Shona society?

5.2 POLYGyny: A CULTURAL BACKGROUND TO SMALL HOUSE RELATIONSHIPS

This section explores the link between polygyny and the *small house* phenomenon if there is any. As discussed in Chapter 2, polygyny has been seen to provide the cultural background for the *small house* relationship, which has been labelled as a form of ‘outside wives’ among the Shona people of Zimbabwe. Despite the tremendous transformation and reconfiguration of Zimbabwean society as a result of industrialisation, colonisation, urbanisation, education and Christianity (Tatira 2010:51; Chireshe 2012:27), polygynous marital practice has remained robust albeit transformed in more subtle ways. It remains to be seen whether the *small house* phenomenon is really mediated by the traditional polygynous tendencies in the Shona society.

5.2.1 Justifications for the *Small house* Relationships by Male Participants

In the various interviews conducted in Harare, the responses indicated that the presence of polygyny in traditional Shona society is used by some men as a basis for justifying their *small house* relationships in contemporary Shona society.

An interview with William, a man in a *small house* relationship, reveals:

I come from a polygynous family background. My grandfather had three wives and my father had two. I am actually a son to a second wife. So in having a small house relationship I took after my father or grandfather. Moreover, I come from a chieftainship background. As you know, in our Shona culture powerful chiefs had several wives.

At the time of the interview, William was 39 years old and had been married for 21 years, which means he had married at the age of 18. When probed further about his *small house* relationship, it emerged that he had had several such relationships and this one was relatively new. In the same interview, William further elaborated:

Most of the time my original wife is in the rural areas and I need another woman to substitute her here in town. I think you understand that a real man does not rely on one woman for sexual satisfaction. I think you also know that cooking is really a problem with us men. So she also cooks for me during my wife's absence.

William's justification for the *small house* relationship reveals rigid gender role socialisation according to Shona culture. Such socialisation tends to allocate prescriptive gender behaviours compatible with either femininity or masculinity (Abbot et al, 2005; Munson & Saulnier, 2013). Consequently; William engages a *small house* because he believes that he cannot perform domestic chores and because his father and grandfather had several wives.

Another interview with Tonderai revealed very similar sentiments to those of William, although he adds another dimension. Tonderai was 32 years old at the time of the interviews and had been married for 10 years. Unlike William, Tonderai did not come from a polygynous family background and went to school only up to Grade 7 because his father could not afford school fees. When asked why he was in a *small house* relationship, he said:

The major reason why I have a small house is mainly for sexual gratification. What I want to tell you is that my wife is a problem. When it comes to sex, she resists what I tell her to do. Personally I enjoy dry sex and tight entry. But my wife fails to prepare herself for this, and so I have no option but to look for an alternative sex partner. There are problems with polygyny, so I would rather have a secret sexual partner.

Tonderai's reason for engaging in a *small house* relationship could involve another stereotype used by Shona men to justify their philandering behaviour. Such perceptions tend to be informed by a patriarchal ideology rooted in the traditional Shona marital practice of polygyny. However, Tonderai's sentiments on his *small house* relationship can be clearly illustrated by social exchange theory which explains that a partner's dependence in a marital relationship is a result of their comparison level. A comparison level alternative refers to the lowest level of outcomes that is equal to or greater than what a partner could obtain from some alternative relationship (Wang, 2004:3; Nakonezny & Denton, 2008:4014). By implication, Tonderai is likely to be attracted to a *small house* relationship if he perceives inadequate benefits in the original marital relationship. When asked why the relationship is kept secret Tonderai said:

Polygyny is out-dated and people will see me as backward and uncivilised, so, I would rather keep a secret partner but at the same time enjoying the benefits of a polygynous marriage.

Another interview with Manuel (53 years old) who is married with three children, two of whom are working and the other one still at school, reveals:

I have a long-standing relationship with my small house and we have a daughter who is in form 2. I had serious problems with my wife, so I sought solace from another woman. My wife was in the habit of starving me sexually as a way of punishing me for our differences and conflicts. In doing so she pushed me to look for another woman. Polygyny is a bit difficult; instead I secured a secret relationship.

Through further probing Manuel concurred with Tonderai that a real man does not rely on one woman for sexual needs; as he put it:

Men need several sexual conquests. You cannot have the same relish every day. There is need for variety. You also know that women have mood swings. When they are in one of those moods, you simply go to your small house.

Such a stereotypical perception of male sexuality in the Shona culture was another reason for polygynous marital relationships in the past (though it was not the main reason) and continues to be the reason for *small house* relationships in contemporary Shona society.

Vengai was 43 years old at the time of the interview. He had been married for 20 years. The marriage took place in the Catholic Church and is also regulated by the Marriage Act 5:11. He holds a Bachelor of Education degree. When asked why he was in a *small house* relationship he said:

I got into this small house relationship 12 years after my marriage. I can say this was a result of peer pressure because all my friends had a small house relationship. It's almost becoming a norm with most men these days. My small house was 28 years when I met her and I took advantage of her advanced age and desperation for marriage. I got convinced that a real man must have a number of sexual conquests. This can explain why our grandfathers had polygynous marriages.

These sentiments of Vengai illustrate how pervasive the *small house* phenomenon has become among the Shona people. Though polygyny was not only meant for sexual gratification, it would seem many *small house* relationships are mediated by sexual gratification for men. The

prevalence of the *small house* phenomenon is further revealed by the former head of state, Robert Mugabe's speech at a wedding:

Small houses, small houses! I said to the cabinet the other day: looking at all of you, who can I say does not have a small house? (The New Zimbabwe online; Tuesday 29 October, 2013).

Such sentiments reveal the extent of the proliferation of the *small house* relationship in Zimbabwe. Like Manuel and William, Vengai justifies his *small house* relationship on the basis of tradition. Perceptions of masculinity in the Shona culture tend to create false impressions or stereotypical perceptions of male sexuality, thereby encouraging multiple concurrent sexual relationships in the form of *small house* relationships.

At the time of the interviews, John was 49 years old and lived in one of the leafy suburbs of Harare. He was married under Marriage Act 5:11 and his wife was employed as a secretary with a company in Harare. John has a Bachelor of Accounting degree and has a very good job. When he was asked about his view on the Marriage Act 5:11 he had this to say:

One bad thing about the Marriage Act Chapter 37 (5:11) is that it does not allow us to have more than one wife. It despises polygyny and emphasises the Western concept of one man, one wife. It's an alien practice that dilutes and defiles the Shona culture.

It could be true that the Marriage Act 5:11 is an alien and Western ideology, but all the same, it can be seen as affirming gender equity and equality in contemporary society. The concept of one man and one wife in a marriage creates a level platform for spouses in terms of negotiating social exchanges in the marital relationship. Thus Westernisation and presumed ideals of Western feminism may be perceived as emancipatory to the African women in marriages. It is against such a background that African feminists advocate for a repeal of some cultural practices like polygyny (Kolawole, 1997). However, there is need to treat polygyny with caution here, because it was not entirely oppressive of women. It may actually reflect women's agency by choosing husbands who were well up.

John had been married for 16 years at the time of the study and had four children with his original wife. His *small house* relationship started in 2010. According to him, when he got

married in 2000, he had just started working at a company as an ordinary accountant. The job did not allow him to travel as he was glued to his desk. When probed further on why he decided to have a *small house* relationship, he said:

It all started when I got promoted to a company buyer. This job involved a lot of travelling, so I was given a company car. What it means here is that I had opportunities for excess money through tips and bribes. One thing for sure is that I had always harboured thoughts to have a second wife, but as you know Chapter 37 does not allow polygyny. So because now I had the money, I decided to have a secretive small house relationship because these days polygyny has its issues.

John's sentiments seem to confirm the claim by some people that when an African man has excess money, he thinks of marrying another wife (Tatira, 2010; Masasire, 1996). This was also true for polygyny in traditional Shona society, as a man had to be rich to have a second wife. As stated before, polygyny was a sign of wealth (Chavhunduka, 1979; Masasire, 1996; Fenske 2011). It is observed that such tendencies have persisted, demonstrating entrenched patriarchal hegemony in the Shona culture.

Wilbert was 40 years old at the time of the interview. He went to school up to O-level and was a long distance truck driver. Like John, Wilbert was married under Marriage Act 5:11 and this is what he had to say:

When I got into this small house relationship, I was 31 years old. I didn't pay roora for my small house. It is risky to do so because Marriage Chapter 37 does not allow a man to marry two or more wives. Moreover I want our relationship to remain secretive.

When asked why he had a *small house* relationship he explained:

First of all I told you that I am a long distance truck driver. I travel extensively, from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. This basically means most of the time I am away from the family and my wife. So I end up deciding to have another woman to entertain myself. This has resulted in this long secretive relationship with my small house. The other reason is that it comes from culture. Our Shona culture allows polygyny. However because I am married under

Chapter 37, I cannot have another official wife. So in the place of another official wife, I have a small house.

As was the case with most of the male participants, Wilbert's sentiments show the extent to which polygynous tendencies are pervasive and entrenched in the Shona culture. The sentiments of the male participants in the various interviews show that the *small house* relationship as a social structure has become a pervasive practice in contemporary Shona society. This therefore points to a sexual relationship that is undertaken by Shona men, ostensibly backed by culture, which reinforces a form of patriarchy. This type of relationship reinforces the power imbalance between men and women and a passive resistance by men to the monogamous ideology which is dictated by law.

It is important here to note that there are inherent tensions here; culture is not static, it is dynamic and as a result of acculturation the Shona people have undermined their cultural practices, including polygynous marital practices. This is illustrated by the adoption of the Marriage Act 5:11, which clearly reflects ideals of a Western marital practice. According to the men interviewed above, those who still cling to and uphold traditional practices, including polygyny, risk being derided as uncivilised. Although some Shona men may still value polygyny, they cannot do so openly owing to the stigma attached to men in such marital relationships. Thus the *small house* relationship becomes an innovation by these Shona men where they claim to uphold the polygynous marital practice, yet they are only attracted to the practice for specific reasons; sexual gratification and domestic services. In other words they are not embracing the entire practice of polygyny. By implication, the term *small house* becomes a euphemism for polygyny and this becomes an excuse by men to continue not accepting gender equality in society. Those involved in *small house* relationships are able to feel detached from the stigma attached to polygyny. In doing so men have created another social structure that regulates their behaviour in contemporary Shona society.

Most of the participants (men and women) indicated that they attended school up to secondary level and two of them obtained degrees. However, comparatively, the men in *small house* relationships had received a higher educational qualification than their partners. This is not surprising because traditionally the provision of education took on a gendered dimension favouring men. What is important here is that all the participants went to school up to a certain level. With such an education level, it is argued here that this could be the reason why both

men and women resort to secretive *small house* relationships because Western education teaches against African traditional marital practices, polygyny included. None of the *small house* partners in this study had more than two children. This could be interpreted as the fact that the women's level of education in *small house* relationships empowers them to have control over their fertility, thereby revealing their agency. This is contrary to traditional Shona society where a woman's body including her fertility was controlled by the man (Tatira, 2010; Chireshe and Chireshe, 2014). In other words, it was the man who decided with whom a woman should have children, how many children to have and at what intervals to have those children. Issues of sexuality assume major importance in a relationship in mediating the trajectory and conditions of such relationships. From the various interviews with the men and women in *small house* relationships, it has been noted that although the relationship is informed by the ideals of traditional polygynous marital practice, it is not embracing the ideals of polygyny in totality; as the changing times of the 21st century may influence the emergence of new sexual relationships.

Most of the responses given by men as reasons for engaging in *small house* relationships point to sexual gratification as the most important social exchange in such relationships. It should be acknowledged that sexuality is a very sensitive and critical issue among the Shona people (Masasire, 1996:14; Bourdillon, 1998:49). As argued in Chapter 2, the issue of sexuality is a contentious one in African societies especially when female sexuality is constrained by men to perpetuate their masculine identity. Based on the responses given above, it can be strongly argued that such typical perceptions of sexuality and masculinity have endured through changing times culminating in the proliferation of *small house* relationships among the Shona people. Shona men, like other men in Southern African cultures, tend to place a lot of value on male sexuality. Men's responses during the different interviews display a masculine mentality which consequently perceives sexuality as one of the last bastions of a patriarchal masculinity. The complexities of gender dynamics in *small house* relationships render it difficult to discern and construct simplistic generalisations; hence, the application of African feminism with its multiple foci on the situations and conditions of women becomes unavoidable.

Langa (2012:22) observes that one of the most common arguments given by men is that having several female sexual partners is an inherent characteristic of African culture. However, such cultural perceptions that are oppressive of women are challenged by African feminists as they tend to undermine women's rights and autonomy (Gaidzanwa, 2010; Kamau, 2012 &

Goredema, 2010). The notion of monogamy thus tends to be labelled Western and alien by the Shona men; a consequence of the acculturation that threatens the ideals of African culture. At the same time, monogamy is celebrated by women who find the traditional polygynous marriage oppressive. Thus marriage becomes a contested terrain as the Shona men tend to hide behind a cultural façade that overemphasises the significance of masculinity and sexual virility. Male power in Shona culture remains one of the main reasons men engage in extramarital affairs, some of which culminate in *small house* relationships which are more or less permanent. During the interviews, Manuel made an analogy between sex and food when he argued that a man should not eat the same food every day. Manuel's sentiments presuppose that sex is a benefit for men; a resource that women should supply to the satisfaction of men. However Amadiume (2004:3) argues that when sexuality is viewed as a benefit for men, sex would incorrectly seem mechanical and only for male gratification and female procreation for which a woman is simply a depository. Such views may reinforce the practice of male power over female sexuality which is not all about sexuality in Africa. In other words, perceptions of sexuality and masculinity in the Shona culture point to a patriarchal hegemony that threatens the very humanity of women. It is argued here that such typical perceptions of male sexuality tend to explain why men in Shona society tend to engage in *small house* relationships. From this perspective, the issue of male engagement with multiple sexual partners becomes one of the most visible consequences of the construction of masculinity. It is also argued here that such masculine mentality and practices have culminated in long sexual relationships which include the secretive *small house* relationships. Thus the social construction of sexuality and masculinity in the Shona culture tends to violate and disregard women's human rights. Up to this point, I have concentrated on some of the reasons why men enter *small house* relationships. The next section explores the nexus between the diaspora phenomenon and *small house* relationships.

5.3 THE DIASPORA PHENOMENON AND THE *SMALL HOUSE* RELATIONSHIP ACCORDING TO MEN

The way in which the economy performs in any one given society is critical for the sustainability of people's livelihoods, as well as for family organisation and stability. In other words, the economy has a direct bearing on the marriage institution and family dynamics. During the interviews almost all the participants lamented the way the political and economic crises in Zimbabwe have negatively impacted on their family lives. In this regard, Sadomba

(2011) postulates that Zimbabwe's unplanned land redistribution or FTLR had ripple effects that ultimately led to economic collapse and political crisis which pushed many Zimbabweans across borders and dispersed them all over the world looking for employment. It should be noted that the movement by Zimbabweans into the diaspora separated husbands from their wives, leaving many marriages susceptible to extramarital relationships. It is also important to note that although the diaspora phenomenon and cross-border trading are different concepts, they are also somewhat connected and hence they are dealt with together here. This view point illuminates the *small house* relationship as a consequence of the economic turmoil in Zimbabwe. Thus opinions voiced by the participants in *small house* relationships indicate that the roots of some of these relationships can be traced back to what has become known as the decade (2000–2009) of economic and political crises (Sadomba, 2011; Kanyenze, Chitambara, Kondo & Martens, 2011).

Sentiments expressed by Jack during the interviews revealed a strong nexus between the diaspora phenomenon and the *small house* phenomenon. Jack was employed by a clothing factory in Harare before he was retrenched in 2003. He then went into the diaspora in South Africa where he worked for some time before he was deported because he did not have the required papers. At the time of the interview, Jack was working as a tailor in the Mbare-Magaba informal sector in Harare. When asked how the *small house* relationship started he explained:

This relationship of mine started in South Africa. When I got retrenched, I went to work in South Africa from 2003 to 2009. This woman used to come to South Africa selling some goods and I used to offer her accommodation until we developed a relationship. When she fell pregnant, we decided to look for a room to lodge in Highfields (a high density suburb in Harare), where she is staying even today. So I would send her some money from South Africa for rentals and other bills.

The scenario presented by Jack clearly illustrates the extent to which the economic crisis in Zimbabwe created an environment that was conducive for extramarital affairs as it resulted in the proliferation of the diaspora phenomenon.

Similarly, an interview with Tom confirmed that the economic crisis and subsequent migration of labour have had a bearing on marital relationships. Tom was once employed by the Dairy

Board Company in Harare and when it decided to downsize, he was one of the first victims. When Tom was asked how the *small house* relationship had started, he explained:

It all started in 2005 when the company that I was working for was downsizing and I was given my retrenchment package. As a form of investment I agreed with my wife to start cross-border trading. So she would go for more than a month selling her wares. She would sell her goods on credit and then collect the money at the month-end. It is during this long absence when I looked for another woman to cover up for my wife's long absence. Unfortunately the woman fell pregnant and since then the relationship seems to have stuck forever. It has been 11 years now in this relationship.

It is thus evident that the economic crisis in Zimbabwe and the subsequent diaspora phenomenon tended to separate spouses for long periods of time putting them in the way of temptation, which in some cases resulted in *small house* relationships.

Another interview with Tsikai also illustrates the relationship between the *small house* phenomenon and the diaspora phenomenon. Having been retrenched, Tsikai, like many during the economic crisis, resorted to cross-border trading. Married with three children, prior to retrenchment he was working for a bakery company in Harare. When asked how this relationship started, Tsikai had this to say:

I lost employment in 2000 and resorted to cross-border trading. So I would go to sell some goods in Botswana and buy some to sell back home. It was during one of these trips that I befriended this woman of mine. I would assist her to carry her goods and at times even pay for her upkeep outside the borders. Eventually we developed a relationship which has endured for more than 15 years now. Fortunately or unfortunately, we don't have children in this relationship. I think she has problems in conceiving because like I told you, I have three children with my wife.

Tsikai's scenario, like Tom's, confirms that separating spouses for long periods of time can have grave ramifications for the stability of the marriage and the family, as spouses may engage more easily in extramarital relationships.

As observed in the interviews with the men in *small house* relationships, the economic crisis in Zimbabwe separated husbands and wives as either the men went into the diaspora or the wife joined the cross-border trade. Jack's scenario also illuminates stereotypical perceptions on femininity (Schippers, 2007), which exposes them to men's predatory sexual tendencies culminating in unsanctioned *small house* relationships. Therefore, Jack's scenario portrays a typical tendency by many men in the diaspora to cultivate temporary sexual relationships (Hattori et al, 2010:8; Townsend, 2013:190; Mazuru, 2014:13) with women that may develop into long-term relationships like the *small house* phenomenon. Thus it can be strongly argued that the economic crisis in Zimbabwe and the subsequent proliferation of the diaspora phenomenon have had and continue to have serious implications for the marriage institution and family organisation. One thing worth noting here is that the economic crisis in Zimbabwe opened up opportunities for some women to exercise some degree of independence by exploring the public sphere through cross-border trading. From an African feminist perspective, in cross-border trading we see the agency and dynamism in African women as they take lead in sourcing provisions for the households. This agency is similar to colonial times when enterprising women brew beer for sale in the mining compounds so that they could pay taxes (Schmidt, 1986 & Barnes, 1997). From the responses given in the interviews above, it would seem that it does not matter whether the man remains in the country or goes abroad; there is a tendency to exploit the absence of his wife by engaging in an extramarital relationship.

It would also seem that the stereotypical perceptions of male sexuality and masculinity among the Shona people that have resulted in a belief that a man cannot abstain from sex for any length of time, influences men to engage in extramarital relationships which at times culminate in relationships like the *small house*. By implication, the diaspora phenomenon can be perceived as a form of labour migrancy which was a common practice in the past where Zimbabwean men would go to work on the South African and Zambian mines (Hattori et al, 2010:8; Mazuru, 2014:13; Bigombe & Khadiagala, 2007:13). Like the diaspora phenomenon, labour migrancy in the past created a situation which made it easy for men to have 'outside wives'.

This section has further expounded on the complexities entrenched in the dynamics of *small house* relationships in light of the diaspora phenomenon. The next section explores women's justification for such relationships.

5.4 THE *SMALL HOUSE* RELATIONSHIP: A SAFE HAVEN FOR WOMEN?

As a place within which women can experience security in the Shona culture, marriage remains highly valued and cherished among the Shona people. Sentiments expressed in various interviews with the men and women in *small house* relationships show that women seek refuge in *small house* relationships (though not a formal marital relationship) when they fail to secure a formal sanctioned marriage. In other words, from the single women's perspective it is better to be in a *small house* relationship than to remain single forever. The social sanctions brought against women who are not identified as attached to men in African societies show the extent to which heterosexuality is cherished and maintained through social control (Machera, 2004:166 & Bourdillon, 1997). In this regard women who remain single, and do not couple with men, are stigmatised and ridiculed. However, women's agency is thus reflected in their volition to engage into unsanctioned sexual relationships with married men as is the case with *small house* relationships in Zimbabwe.

The findings of this study indicate that many female participants in *small house* relationships had had some experience of monogamous marriages but for one reason or another had divorced or separated. It is also observed here that those women, who had never married, found themselves in *small house* relationships because they realised that they had outgrown their 'marriageable age'. Shona society continues to frown on women who are older than 30 and still single (known as *tsikombi*) and accuse them of prolonging singlehood and may be suspected to have a spiritual husband (Chirozva et al, 2006; Mapuranga, 2010:74). Thus, for the Shona, a woman has to be relatively young to be married and men tend to marry women who are much younger than them (Chirozva et al, 2006). Most of the justifications given by women for having *small house* relationships illustrate the robustness and pervasiveness of a patriarchal hegemony in Shona society which depicts men as the source for women's livelihood. As a result of stereotypical perceptions on femininity, women in the Shona society expect men to provide for their needs (Tatira, 2010; Chireshe & Chireshe, 2014). Since they have failed to either enter or stay in a formal marriage, women tend to weigh the social exchanges in *small house* relationships and regard them as an alternative source of financial, social and emotional security. Expectations of social, financial and emotional support from men were conspicuous in the responses given by women in *small house* relationships.

5.4.1 Financial and social aspects

An interview with Beauty revealed that a woman may expect a lot from *small house* relationships. Beauty was 46 years old at the time of the interviews. Her mother was in a polygynous marriage. According to Beauty her mother's aunt could not conceive, so her mother was taken by her aunt to become a second wife to her husband. This was and still is a common practice among the Shona people (Masasire, 1996:46; Bourdillon, 1998:48; Tatira, 2010:44). Shortly afterwards her mother became pregnant and at almost the same time the aunt conceived as well. When the aunt realised that she was pregnant, she chased Beauty's mother away. Beauty related how polygynous marital relationships are prevalent in her family – her mother, Beauty herself (before this *small house* relationship) and Beauty's first daughter were all born in such circumstances. During the interview, Beauty broke down as she narrated the circumstances with regards to her *small house* relationship. As a survival strategy Beauty recycles plastic empty bottles and other containers. It's a menial job which has no meaningful returns, bringing in about \$40 to \$50 per month, while her rent, water and electricity bills exceed \$100. She also needs food for the family. Beauty's circumstances tend to be worsened by the harsh economic conditions prevailing in Zimbabwe. Women's agency is reflected by her effort to work in the informal sector. When asked why then she resorted to a *small house* relationship, she responded:

After having tried marriage with a number of men, I realised that it was not working for me. So ultimately I settled for a secretive relationship with this married man. The major reason is to have assistance in paying rentals or even the upkeep of my children. Unfortunately my partner does not have a stable job, so in terms of financial assistance, I get very little out of it.

These sentiments indicate that Beauty entered the *small house* relationship expecting both economic and social security. However, she seemed unhappy in the relationship because her expectations had not been met. From a social exchange perspective, Beauty endures her relationship because she has no other alternative. However, she does experience some form of social support in her current relationship although financial support is a challenge.

In another interview Kaycee shared the same sentiments as Beauty. Kaycee was 36 years old and went to school up to O-level. Her parents had a polygynous marriage because her father

was also married to her mother's young sister. Kaycee herself fell pregnant at 20 and the man denied responsibility for the pregnancy. She has two children with her current partner, both of whom are going to school. She sells vegetables at the market and she reported that she struggles to make ends meet. She may make a profit of up to \$70 per month. She thus finds it difficult to meet her living expenses which range from \$180 to \$200 per month. When asked why she got into this relationship she said:

I was a single mother and desperately needed money to support my child. So when I met this man, he promised me a lot of things. He is a successful businessman, he promised me a car, house and to open a business for me. He also promised to secure a passport for me so that I would do cross-border trading. Most importantly, he promised to look after my child because I had a child with another man.

Like Beauty, Kaycee sought refuge in a *small house* relationship; an attitude inculcated by stereotypical gender role socialisation in the Shona culture, where men are the breadwinners and women work in the home expecting the husband to provide (Mavungu, 2013; Chereni, 2015). When probed further, Kaycee admitted that she knew that the man had a wife but believed that because he had lots of money, he would be able to take care of both of them. As the interview progressed, Kaycee revealed:

At the beginning of the relationship he used to do everything for me. He would pay my rentals, water and electricity bills or even medical bills for my child. As for now things have changed, I am now struggling and the man seems to have changed his heart. Sadly this is happening at a time when I have two children with him. All the things he promised never materialised. I wasted my time with this man. I now have three children and I cannot walk out of this relationship and marry again.

Although Kaycee expects support from her partner, she shows agency by engaging in vending to source provisions for the household in very difficult economic conditions. Both Beauty and Kaycee had entered *small house* relationships expecting to receive financial support from their male partners. Social exchange theory helps us to understand why people enter relationships and how the benefits they receive influence their intention to stay in the relationships. In some cases, they see no alternatives and gender socialisation has undermined their agency or

willpower to look for other solutions. Kaycee and Beauty are not the only ones in this predicament.

Omega, another woman in a *small house* relationship, shared her experiences during the interview. Omega was 46 years old at the time of interviews and she had done her O-levels in 1988. She said she did not write examinations because her father could not afford the examination fees because he had a large family to support, having four wives. Omega's mother was the eldest wife. Her father had inherited his late brother's wife, a common practice in the Shona culture as discussed above (Masasire, 1996:46; Bourdillon, 1998:48; Tatira, 2010:44) and had also married two other wives. Omega married in 1990 but her husband passed on in 1998 leaving her with two children. At the time of the interview, Omega was buying and selling small wares and said that she realised very little profit because of the poor state of the Zimbabwean economy. At the same time she is expected to meet living expenses in excess of \$200 per month. She also has another child in the *small house* relationship who was in Form II¹. When probed further as to why she was in a *small house* relationship, she explained:

I stayed for two years after the death of my husband without any sexual relationship. You know as someone who had some experience in a marriage, it was very difficult to contain my sexual desire, naturally I needed a man. Besides sexual satisfaction, I also get financial assistance in terms of paying water, electricity and medical bills including my rentals. My partner also assists in buying food for the family.

It is clear that Omega, like any other woman in small relationships, sees beneficial social exchanges in the form of social and economic security as well as sexual gratification.

In another interview, Esnath relayed similar experiences as the above mentioned women in *small house* relationships. Esnath was 39 years old at the time of the interview and had attended school up to Form I. She dropped out of school because of financial constraints. She comes from a polygynous background though at some point her father took her mother's sister for a wife and later divorced her. Esnath married at 19 and had two children from that marriage. In reflecting on this, she believed that she had been too young to make decisions on marital issues. She divorced her husband on the grounds of his promiscuousness. She is employed to sell

¹ The secondary school education in Zimbabwe stretches from Form I Form VI.

hardware goods in the informal sector for which she is paid just \$100 a month. On top of rent and water and electricity, she has to meet transport costs which amount to \$24 per month. When asked why she settled for a *small house* relationship, she stated:

The first thing here is that I needed some company. Secondly, I think I have told you that the money that I get from my job is not enough to meet living expenses. So, this man pays rentals, water and electricity bills as well as my medical bills. At the same time, I offer him services expected of a wife because he does not get these since his wife is always in the rural area.

Quite clearly Esnath sees benefits in the social exchanges involved in her relationship. Generally, the interviews discussed above highlight a culture that awards the man the stereotypical role of provider, hence women make sure that they are in a relationship to be supported and provided for. It is argued here that perceptions on female sexuality in African societies tend to affect their self-esteem and confidence; hence they become less assertive and compromise their negotiation for social exchanges in the *small house* relationships. For the women interviewed above, the *small house* relationship became an alternative to secure social and economic security when a formal marriage had failed.

One interesting scenario concerned Rutendo, another woman in a *small house* relationship, who had convinced her partner to marry her in terms of the Marriage Act 5:11 to make sure the property bought by her partner was secure for her use. Rutendo is 29 years of age. She is unemployed and survives on what her partner in the *small house* relationship provides. Her partner is 51 years old, resulting in an age difference of 22 years. When asked how she ended up securing the civil marriage, Rutendo said:

Men are like children, they are easy to convince. I simply capitalised on our age difference; men are fond of young women. So, I set the conditions when the relationship was still fresh and vibrant. I convinced him to register our marriage for the sake of our child but the idea was to protect the property he had bought for me. I made sure I wouldn't lose the property in case of a separation or divorce. I knew he was married but their marriage was not registered. What it now means is that, although I am not known to his parents and relatives, I am his legal wife.

In an unusual twist of events, Rutendo managed to register the *small house* relationship as a marriage by using the current legal conditions in Zimbabwe to her advantage. The provisions of LAMA 1982 of Zimbabwe allows a woman to contract a marriage without the consent of the parent provided neither of the parties involved have a registered marriage (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006; Barnes, 1992). Rutendo's situation points to the extent to which some women desperately seek security in *small house* relationships. Accordingly, Rutendo has actually become the legitimate wife under civil marriage law in Zimbabwe. Although her partner's first wife is married under customary law, civil marriage law takes precedence in Zimbabwe. From what the interviewed women said, the *small house* relationship becomes a refuge for material and financial security.

What seems to be common in the responses given by the women in *small house* relationships is that the relationship is seen as an alternative to either monogamous marriage or polygynous marriage. For these women, what remains very critical is that they have children, a life partner and above all (or initially the promise of) social and economic security. Looked at from this angle, the *small house* relationship becomes a refuge for women who have had problems securing a sanctioned marriage in Shona society. This therefore illustrates the high value placed on heterosexual relationships by the Shona people. None of the interviewed women expressed problems with formal polygyny; what they fear is the stigma attached by the Shona people to polygyny in the contemporary, and the so-called modern society; that it is a backward and uncivilised practice. It can thus be observed that, the notion of polygyny or even the *small house* phenomenon becomes a contested terrain among women themselves; those 'inside' marriage will have none of it while for those 'outside' marriage, polygyny or the *small house* relationship is an alternative to monogamous marriage and a source of security.

Fungai, another woman in a *small house* relationship also shared her experiences during interviews. Fungai was 39 years old at the time and had attended school up to Grade 7. She had never been married and was 34 years old when she began the *small house* relationship. She has a child who was born approximately one year after the *small house* relationship started. Fungai is unemployed. She revealed that when her partner was employed, he used to pay her rent, water and electricity bills. When asked why she settled for a *small house* relationship, she said:

First of all, I had outgrown my marriageable age. Secondly, I also wanted someone to assist in paying rent as well as water and electricity bills. Lastly, I expected to raise a

family and be respected in our society. Securing employment is very difficult because I don't have any qualifications. My father did not send me to school just because I am a woman. So by getting into this relationship, I thought I could secure the basic necessities for life.

The issue of securing social and financial security was common in most of the interviews held with the women in these relationships. Fungai highlights a critical issue – lack of education. This would seem to be one of the main reasons women remain dependent on men for their economic survival. This starts with stereotypical gender perceptions of the future role of the girl child in Shona society. Parents prefer to send the boy child to school because they believe that the girl child will get married and thus be supported by a husband (Machakanja, 2004; Tatira, 2010). Such cultural perceptions of femininity are challenged by African feminists as they tend to hinder opportunities for education and subsequent employment for the girl child (Gaidzanwa, 2010; Goredema, 2010). As discussed in Chapter 2, this is not surprising as the history of Zimbabwe shows that when Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, most women who had participated in the liberation struggle did not get jobs because they were not educated (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006). This partially explains why some women resort to *small house* relationships when they fail to secure a legitimate and accepted marriage in Shona culture.

Another interview with Chipo reinforced the fact that the *small house* relationship has become a livelihood option for some women. Chipo was 42 years old at the time of the interview and had attended school up to Form III. Chipo's parents were monogamous. She left school because she was pregnant and had her first child at the age of 18. Chipo was unemployed but sometimes buys earrings, bangles and necklaces to sell. When asked why she was in a *small house* relationship, she said:

The major reason was that I desperately wanted marriage but failed to secure one. You know in our Shona culture it is very difficult to get a husband of your own if you have a child. The other thing is that I wanted someone to assist me in looking after my child. I was also running away from the stigma attached to unattached women in our Shona society. Lastly I also wanted sexual satisfaction.

Like the other women discussed above, Chipo expected assistance from a man in looking after her child, thus showing that she had been socialised not to think that she could be independent

and work for herself to provide for her child. Women's expectations of receiving support from men in Shona society could be a result of stereotypical perceptions on men as breadwinners.

I will now proceed to discuss some women who are financially stable but in *small house* relationships. Some of the female participants were financially stable but found themselves in *small house* relationships for other reasons; these included sexual gratification and the respect that accompanies heterosexual relationships and motherhood in the African culture in general and the Shona culture in particular (Adebayo, 1996; Akujobi, 2011; Makaudze, 2015:266). Although such women are financially stable, they seek social and emotional security in *small house* relationships. However, it can be observed that women who are gainfully employed have more say in the relationship; they can voice their concerns.

An interview with Tichaona, one of the men in a *small house* relationship, confirms that women who are economically independent have a say in relationship negotiations. Tichaona was 42 years old when interviewed and was married under customary law. He survives on making and selling wire mesh in the informal sector. His *small house* woman is a soldier in the Zimbabwean national army. When he was asked about the nature of their relationship, he said:

What I want you to understand is that this small house woman of mine is not a pushover; she is actually employed as a soldier with a rank in the army. Although she is working, I give her money for the upkeep of our child on a monthly basis. If I fail to provide for the child, she threatens to tell my wife about our affair, and she really means it. So I am in a fix brother.

From what Tichaona is saying we see agency in women where the *small house* threatens to expose the secretive relationship. Another interview with Rudo revealed that women do not assume a subordinate position in a relationship if they are gainfully employed. Rudo is 36 years old and is employed as a secretary with a company in Harare. She has two children; one with another man from a previous relationship and the other from her current *small house* relationship. When asked whether she gets financial assistance from her partner she said:

I do my own things. I didn't get into this relationship to be financially or materially supported, no! I am employed as a secretary but you see, as a woman there are times when you need a man and it is important that I raise a family. So when I failed to

secure a husband of my own, I realised time was running out and settled for this relationship. I need company.

Rudo and Tichaona's partner demonstrate women's agency as well as assertiveness and autonomy and this reveals alternative femininities where women reject and resist male dominance (Schippers, 2007). What Rudo wants is a relationship that will give her company with no strings attached,

These cases reiterate the claim that marriage is valued among Shona women. Gender role socialisation in Shona society inculcates a reverence for and the relevance of the marriage institution in every girl so that this almost becomes the apex of every woman's achievements in life. In other words, such societal and parental attitudes towards marriage have made women believe that the success of every woman lies in marriage. Shorter (in Mapuranga 2010:74-75) observes that a woman's fertility and marital status are the source of her social identity, and marriage provides women with economic and social support that would not be available if they were single. From the responses given by women in *small house* relationships, it is very clear that the relationship was only considered once the monogamous marriage or the option for such a marriage had failed. The *small house* relationship is therefore an alternative that provides social exchanges that are beneficial to women in such relationships. Thus looking for an alternative relationship which provides almost (although not quite) similar benefits also reflects women's agency.

Similarly, the interview with Beauty clearly shows that she resorted to a *small house* relationship because she perceived beneficial trade-offs in the form of social, emotional and most importantly financial support. The social exchange theory illuminates how the development, maintenance and decay of exchanges in relationships gravitate towards the balance between the rewards that partners perceive and the challenges they experience by engaging in relationships. These perceptions determine the nature and direction of the relationship (Nakonezny & Denton, 2008:402). Beauty's sentiments are echoed by all the other female participants. It would seem that because of gender role socialisation, most women in this study expect men to provide the resources needed for survival (paying the rent, water and electricity bills and buying food). However, the study reveals that this expectation is not always as the relationship continues. In other words, they place all their hopes in the security provided by men in marital relationships. Some men are aware of this and take advantage of it and use

it as justification for multiple concurrent sexual relationships. It can thus be argued that the *small house* relationship becomes a livelihood safety net by providing social, emotional and economic security to some women in Shona society.

Women's interview responses show that when they enter the *small house* relationship, many have no material resources that can be used as social exchanges. In this regard, stereotypical perceptions of male and female sexuality among the Shona people make sex a very important resource in their relationship negotiations (Chitauro-Mawema, 2003). As discussed in Chapter 3, the basis of social exchange theory as applied to romantic relationships is that sex in the heterosexual community is a valuable commodity that a woman gives to a man in exchange for other commodities. Thus, in *small house* relationships it has been observed that women use sex as a resource in exchange for payment of the rent, water and electricity bills. During one interview, Esnath did not mince her words, clearly explaining that she offers her man sexual services in exchange for her upkeep. In so doing, *small house* relationships have become a haven or livelihood safety net for women in such relationships. It is here observed that a woman can make up for inequalities in a relationship by offering sex while a man cannot do the same if he is in an inferior position in a relationship (Chitauro-Mawema, 2003:138; Wang, 2004:2). Esnath's sentiments show that although the *small house* relationship remains gendered, women tend to benefit from such relationships.

The interviews with both Omega and Chipso revealed that besides sex, men also seek household services particularly cooking in *small house* relationships. Although sex is the most sought after resource by men in *small house* relationships, it also remains a treasured benefit for women in such relationships. In support, Chitauro-Mawema (2003:138) elaborates that while sex is seen by Shona society to benefit men, sexual fulfilment is also a benefit sought by women in a relationship. When looked at it from this angle, it would seem women in *small house* relationships have nothing to lose; they seem to benefit more than men do. Nevertheless, since sex in the Shona culture is perceived as a benefit for men, for women in *small house* relationships compensation for sexual intimacy is given in the form of security or items of monetary value. Explained in this fashion, sex becomes a primary female resource and hence women seek to keep the price of their resource high while men tend to negotiate a lower price (Wang, 2004:7). Although women in *small house* relationships seem to benefit more than men, the truth of the matter is they are on the losing side because they are sharing a male partner and in most cases, as witnessed in the different interviews, they have no power to set the conditions

of the relationship. This implies that since they are sharing, they may not have a partner as and when they want him. However, what makes such relationships enduring is that both parties perceive a balance of social exchanges and for women it reflects their agency as the *small house* becomes an alternative to marriage.

The preceding paragraph postulates that women have nothing to lose in *small house* relationships in terms of the resources that are exchanged. However, relationships are not all about material and service exchanges, there are issues like power, freedom, conditions and the sustainability of the relationship that have to be taken cognisance of. Although there seems to be mutual and reciprocal benefits in *small house* relationships, the balance of power generally belongs to the partner who contributes greater resources to the relationship (Blau, 1964:138; Nakonezny & Denton, 2008:405) and in most cases, as evidenced by responses given by women in such relationships, it is the man. The different interviews revealed that women in *small house* relationships expect men to provide financial and material support hence the balance of power tends to be skewed in favour of men. Moreover, men tend to have an alternative relationship (their original family) and do not entirely depend on the *small house* relationship for their needs. It can thus be argued that resource differential produces asymmetrical relationships which then allow exploitative sexual relationships. Nevertheless, *small house* relationships persist because they are perceived as a livelihood safety net by the women in such relationships. During the interviews, many women pointed out that they expect their *small house* partners to pay their rent, water and electricity bills, and children's school fees and buy food for the household. For some, this is the very reason they enter such relationships. I therefore argue that while such thinking points to entrenched stereotypical perceptions of hegemonic masculinity in Shona society, it also reveals women's agency in coming up with a source of livelihood.

Although it has been argued that the dependence by most women in *small house* relationships tends to be mediated by their low socioeconomic status, there were a few who were formally employed and had a stable income. For these women, *small house* relationships tend to be mediated by the desire to attain motherhood, companionship and sexual gratification (Adebayo, 1996; Akujobi, 2011; Makaudze, 2015:266). For such women, their negotiating power for social exchanges in *small house* relationships tends to be relatively balanced. A case in point is Tichaona's *small house* partner who is formally employed as a soldier in the Zimbabwean army. She represents the 'new African woman', whose behaviour reflects alternative

femininities as she resists hegemonic masculinities which tend to relegate women to the confines of the domestic sphere (Kambarami, 2006; Ahikire, 2014; Abbot et al, 2005). As a result, such women have the power to influence the nature and direction of the relationship.

Tichaona could be one of the rare cases in *small house* relationships where the woman has the upper hand. In such cases the man is compelled to play the economic and social fatherhood roles. What is important to note here is that a high educational level and a stable socio-economic status for women bring a balance of power in social exchange negotiations in relationships. In this regard, Townsend (2013:19) observes that women are becoming co-providers and breadwinners in families although it can still be observed that it remains the primary task of fathers to provide families with economic security. As women assume the breadwinner role, it is important to consider symmetrical relationship obligations. However, the challenge is that *small house* relationships tend to be shrouded in secrecy and as such it becomes very difficult for men to fully commit themselves to such a relationship, either as a partner or as a father.

As was the case with Tichaona's partner, it was observed that Rudo spoke with confidence and authority. She is also another example of a 'new African woman'; totally independent and autonomous with the power to influence the nature and course of a relationship. In other words, her socio-economic status is a resource for negotiating the nature of the *small house* relationship. This illustrates the complexities entrenched in the dynamics of *small house* relationships; it is not easy to generalise about women's circumstances in *small house* relationships. However, the bottom line here is that the sustainability of *small house* relationships depends on the benefits perceived by both parties involved. In this context, the *small house* relationship becomes a livelihood safety net for some women in Shona society. This then leads to a discussion on the reverence and importance of marriage and motherhood in Shona society and the place of the *small house* relationship vis-à-vis the stigma attached to unmarried and childless women.

5.5 THE SMALL HOUSE RELATIONSHIP: AN ALTERNATIVE ROUTE TO MOTHERHOOD

Raising a family in the context of a marriage is one of the most enviable aspects of Shona culture. It is the expectation of every parent that a daughter or a son will secure a dignified and

sanctified marriage. For women, marriage and subsequent motherhood are not only very important in Shona society, but are also associated and intertwined with great power, respect and reverence (Makaudze, 2015:266; Tatira, 2010; Mazuru & Nyambi, 2012). By contrast, motherhood is a concept that is criticised by certain radical feminists as one of the root causes of women's subordination, disempowerment and lack of independence (Abbot et al, 2005; Munson & Saulnier, 2013). In this research, it was found that certain Shona women resort to *small house* relationships to escape the stigma attached to unattached and childless women. In other words, femininity entails attributes that are perceived as womanly and these attributes include motherhood and child rearing (Kambarami, 2006). The sentiments expressed by the men and women in *small house* relationships revealed that an unmarried woman, especially one without children, is regarded as incomplete.

An interview with John, a successful buyer who has a *small house* relationship, revealed:

In our Shona culture women who would have outlived their marriageable age are derided and stigmatised; they are referred to as tsikombi (a derogatory term referring to a woman who has outgrown her marriageable age). There are a lot of explanations and beliefs associated with the tsikombi status. Some believe they are possessed by evil spirits and some think they have spiritual husbands.

Given such circumstances, it is argued here that a woman would rather have a *small house* relationship than remain single and childless. The label attached to unattached women by Shona society is so humiliating that some women become innovative and engage in *small house* relationships despite the fact that the man may have another family. The reverence for heterosexual relationships is central in Shona society. The social construction of marriage in the context of the Shona culture makes it one of the most desirable and enviable status of a woman but when a woman fails to secure one, she would rather settle for a stable informal relationship (like *small house* relationships). At least, as discussed in Chapter 2 *small house* relationships are different from prostitution.

John's sentiments are also shared by Omega, one of the women in a *small house* relationship. During the interview, Omega expressed the importance of marriage as follows:

If you delay to marry, people may regard you as a prostitute. Unmarried women lack respect among the Shona people especially if you don't have children. Some people may think you have a spiritual husband. A hoarse voice (man's voice) should be heard in a woman's house. If you delay marriage, it's better to have a small house relationship and have children. It doesn't matter the man is married, what is bad is to have a number of sexual partners.

The behaviour expected of women is thus restrictive; if you are not married, you should have children and hence a sexual relationship, but not multiple relationships. From a feminist perspective, this implies control over women's bodies. The *tsikombi* stigma is a ploy by the patriarchal Shona society to compel women into a sexual relationship. By implication women in the Shona society tend to have less control over their sexuality and therefore their bodies. Women should not be blamed for resorting to the *small house* relationship; it reflects their innovativeness in the current harsh economic conditions in Zimbabwe.

Tawanda, another man in a *small house* relationship, echoed these sentiments during an interview:

The Shona society stigmatises women who would have outlived their marriageable age. Such women are believed to have been cursed; hence they cannot secure a husband for marriage. Some believe that such girls are used by their parents in rituals for success in business or farming. So, for some women it is the need to have children (motherhood) that pushes them into small house relationships.

Gararirimo, a businessman in a *small house* relationship, sums it all up when he says:

I am a Ndau (a Shona dialect) and in Ndau such girls who would have outlived their marriageable age are called tsikombi and are believed to be possessed by evil spirits or may have spiritual husbands. Generally it's shameful to be single and remain childless. At 35 girls become desperate, and for sure they cannot secure single men as husbands. They end up settling for madala (old men) like me, because they need children. Women are therefore justified to be in small house relationships.

Generally, sentiments expressed by the participants show the entrenched reverence and importance of marriage and subsequent motherhood in Shona society. By the same token, in the Shona culture motherhood becomes more special if a woman gives birth to a male child. To this end, Davis (in Eviwerhoma 2007:318) elaborates that in many African societies motherhood (a son preferably) defines womanhood and to marry entitles a woman to more respect among the husband's kinsmen. Tichaona shared his experience during interviews:

The main reason I got into the small house relationship is that I was looking for a boy child. I have three daughters in my original family. Unfortunately in this relationship I have two more daughters. I haven't resigned in my quest for a boy child because sons are important as they perpetuate the family name. Girls will be married off and leave home.

Tichaona's perceptions illustrate his view of the importance of a boy in a family in the Shona culture. Therefore, a woman who bears a boy commands more respect from her husband's kinsmen (Makaudze, 2015). Motherhood thus becomes a differentiated gendered phenomenon among the Shona people if boys are preferred to girls. An interview with Gararirimo also revealed:

Some men end up in small house relationships because they will be looking for a boy child. My case was different though, all the children in my original family are boys. I never got worried about having a girl child because in our family we are all boys. Remember I said I am a Ndau and in our culture boys are regarded as more important than girls because girls get married to other families and boys perpetuate the family name. They are the heirs of the family inheritance. Women become proud mothers if they have boy children. However, having girl children is much better than to remain childless. A childless person remains stigmatised as ngomwa (a derogative term). In the Shona culture marriage without a boy child remains incomplete and problematic. In the past it was one of the reasons men would marry polygynously.

The patriarchal nature of the Shona society is here reflected in its preference for a boy to the girl. It is the reason some African feminists interrogate and challenge such cultural practices, which perpetuate gender inequalities based on stereotypical perceptions of femininity and masculinity (Masuku, 2005:51; Ahikire, 2014:9). By implication motherhood in the Shona

culture takes on a gender dimension if people accord a higher status to a boy just because he carries the family name. Chavhunduka (1979) as well as Makaudze (2015) observed that that having girl children only in a family is a stressful experience for both men and women; they may go to the extent of consulting a traditional spiritual healer who is believed to have the power to change the sex of a child at conception. When all these attempts fail, the man has an option to search elsewhere. Thus, from a social exchange perspective, a married man is likely to be attracted to another sexual relationship if he perceives inadequate benefits (failure to have a boy child) in the original marital relationship (Nakonezny & Denton, 2008:402). Traditionally, under such circumstances a man would initiate a polygynous marital relationship; however, since polygyny tends to be incompatible with the current socio-economic dispensation, under similar circumstances men may resort to *small house* relationships.

Contrary to the preceding sentiments on the importance of a son in a marriage, an interview with Tawanda revealed:

I got into this small house relationship because I had too many sons and I was looking for a daughter. I had always wished my first born to be a girl and when I got a daughter from my small house relationship, I was very excited and happy.

It is only this participant who expressed a preference for a girl. When asked why he preferred a daughter to a son while most fathers seem to be looking for a boy, Tawanda indicated:

I believe a girl never forgets her parents in their old age, she continues to support them financially and materially. It doesn't matter whether she is married or not, she always remembers her parents. As for the boy, the moment he gets married he tends to forget about his parents and starts concentrating on his life and that of his in-laws. There is also an issue of roora. I also expect to receive roora from a son-in-law. Girls are a source of wealth.

The above sentiments illustrate the extent of the complexities in the gender preference of children. The reasons for *small house* relationships are diverse and not easily predicted, but the need to attain motherhood by women partially explains the proliferation for the *small house* phenomenon in contemporary society. The transference of a woman's fertility to the husband's

family is perceived as critical in the Shona culture (Masasire et al 1996; Adebayo 1996; Mazuru & Nyambi, 2012). Perceptions of the men and women in *small house* relationships of this study indicated that although a boy child is perceived to be more important than a girl child, either may be desired in a marital or sexual relationship for the benefit of men. They may want a daughter so that they can receive *roora* and a caretaker for old age and a son to perpetuate their family name. The *small house* phenomenon can be explained in the context of changing times and circumstances, and the reasons for entering into such relationships demonstrate continuities and discontinuities for intimate relationships in African societies.

Marriage among the Shona people remains of great value even in so-called modern society. However, since polygyny tends to be deemed out-dated and uncivilised in contemporary Shona society, the *small house* relationship becomes an emerging social structure through men's innovation to secure more than one sexual partner (and domestic services if needed) that they link to polygyny in their minds in a different socio-cultural, socioeconomic and socio-political dispensation. However, women are worse off in *small house* relationships compared to polygyny, since there is no official recognition from the families about the existence of their exclusive domestic and sexual relationships with men. It can therefore be strongly argued that the emerging *small house* relationships among the Shona people can be construed as a consequence of the Shona people's reverence for heterosexual relationships and motherhood. As discussed in Chapter 2, for Africans in general and the Shona people in particular motherhood is perceived as sacred and a powerful spiritual component of a woman's life (Akujobi, 2011:3; Makaudze, 2015: 266). Thus for Shona women, femininity implies mothering and this takes precedence over everything else in their socio-cultural endeavours.

5.6 ROORA AND SMALL HOUSE RELATIONSHIPS

In the Shona culture a legitimate marriage is one that is sanctioned and sanctified by the payment of *roora*. The payment of *roora* remains an integral traditional practice and custom among the Shona people. Thus, as stated in Chapter 2, any marriage which does not involve the payment of *roora* is not credible and may even be regarded as prostitution (Mangena & Ndlovu, 2013:472). This then confirms that the *small house* relationship is not a marriage among the Shona people. The findings of this study indicate that most men did not pay *roora* for their *small house* women. The proceedings of marriage in Shona culture must involve both families, and marriage is perceived as a contract between the two families and not the individual

lovers (Masasire et al, 1996; Tatira, 2010). Thus, in cases where *roora* is paid for a *small house* partner, the proceedings tend to deviate from the normative Shona cultural practices. This could be one of the reasons *small house* relationships remain unsanctioned and unacknowledged in Shona society.

Responding to a question on *roora* during an interview, Wilbert said:

I did not pay roora for my small house woman. It's very risky to do because Marriage Act 5:11 does not allow a man to marry two or more wives. Moreover our relationship is secretive.

Unlike polygyny, *small house* relationships are based on a mutual understanding between the two parties involved. There are no marital rituals performed to sanctify the marriage as expected by the Shona culture (Masasire et al, 1996; Chavhunduka, 1979). Thus, such a deviation from the Shona script of marital norms results in the *small house* relationship experiencing a myriad of social problems, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

During an interview, Gararirimo shared the same sentiments as Wilbert:

For the small house, I never paid roora so I am not known to her parents. She is neither known to my people except one muzukuru, a son to my aunt. Remember I am married under Chapter 37 and this marriage restricts men to one wife.

The civil marriage regulated by the Marriage Act 5:11, formerly known as Chapter 37, tends to be very unpopular with some men in contemporary Shona society. A study in Zambia by Kandiyoti (1988) reveals that men in Zambia (like their counterparts in Zimbabwe) resist the more modern ordinance marriage, as opposed to customary marriage, because it burdens them with greater obligations for their wives and children. The provisions of Marriage Act 5:11 tend to emphasise monogamous marriage and thus could be one of the reasons many men wish it to be repealed. As evidenced by the responses given by the two participants above, it is a contributing reason for some *small house* relationships to be kept secret. The issue is that the *small house* relationships are neither accepted by civil law nor recognised under customary law.

Fungai, another *small house* woman, also revealed during an interview:

My partner is not known to my parents because he hasn't paid roora but he is known to my sisters. At our rural home in Murehwa a marriage where there is no roora paid is referred to as kuchaya mapoto (cohabitation) and parents feel ashamed of such a union.

It is important to note that the notion of *kuchaya mapoto* referred to by Fungai draws many parallels with the *small house* phenomenon. Neither is sanctioned by Shona society since the relationships do not involve both families – only the two parties who are in love. However, the *mapoto* marriage is open and is usually a monogamous relationship although no *roora* is paid (Chavhunduka, 1979). Failure to pay *roora* thus makes it difficult for social interaction between the parents and relatives of partners in *small house* relationships, especially since they do not know each other because the relationship is secretive. It is one of the reasons women in *small house* relationships lead a solitary and secretive life.

An interview with Chipu who is a *small house* woman also reveals:

My 'husband' did not pay roora but he is known to a number of my relatives including my parents. They have come to accept him as someone staying with their daughter. We even buy them groceries if we have money.

There seems to be a change in attitude regarding *roora* among some Shona people; some parents now allow interaction even though no *roora* is paid. The softening of attitude on *roora* by some Shona parents could be interpreted as a result of an adaption to the changing world as culture is dynamic; it changes with time and place. Moreover, *roora* has been perceived by some women as the reason for their oppression (Sithole, 2005:15; Nkosi, 2011:32). Similarly, Mangena and Ndlovu (2013:474) observe that the payment of *roora* is one of the ways in which men assert power over women, especially in view of the fact that men are in control of the *roora* payment proceedings and rituals. The practice of paying *roora* in Shona society is one of the typical cultural practices challenged by the African feminists since they perceive it as violating their rights and compromising their integrity. To the contrary, a study by Shope (2006) reveals that *lobolo* is still valued in some African societies as it accords dignity and respect to women. Shope further elaborates that despite efforts to regulate and shape the

practice of *lobolo* through customary law, the practice has endured and its persistence is indicative of its widespread and its ability to adapt to the changing socio-political contexts. It would then seem that Shona society (like any other African society) is divided in terms of their perceptions of the significance of *roora*, with some parents still insisting on the payment of *roora* as revealed by Kaycee during an interview. She had this to say:

My 'husband' has not paid roora for me. I am only known to his mother and one of his sisters, but they make sure the first wife doesn't know that we are seeing each other. My (vamwene) mother-in-law loves her grandson very much. I think it's the reason they come to see me because a male child is very important in the Shona culture. My parents do not approve this small house relationship of mine.

It is observed here that Kaycee regards herself as being married even though no *roora* has been paid for her. This is evident in the use of the terms 'husband' and 'vamwene'. In Shona, the terms *murume wangu* ('my husband') and *vamwene vangu* (my mother-in-law) imply that the woman is officially married. However, it remains very clear that a sexual relationship that has not gone through the rituals of a marriage in Shona culture ceases to be a marriage; hence Kaycee is perceived to be in an informal sexual relationship. Another issue is that Shona culture places great value on grandchildren (*vazukuru*) especially if the grandchildren are male, as was seen in this case.

I move on to discuss cases where *roora* has been paid for the *small house* woman. Although *roora* is not paid in most *small house* relationships, there are rare cases where *roora* has been paid for the *small house* woman and this makes the *small house* a complex phenomenon. Marara elaborated during an interview:

I actually paid roora for this woman and I am known as a legitimate son-in-law. Unfortunately, my small house is not known to my relatives except one of my brothers whom I trust so much. The reason I paid roora is that we have a boy child and as such, he must legitimately belong to my family. If there is no roora paid, that son is perceived as gora (a bastard) in our Shona culture.

The patriarchal nature of Shona society is further illustrated here, where the importance of a boy child is associated with the payment of *roora*. Vengai concurs with Marara when he says:

It's shameful to have a small house relationship in our Shona culture. Some people see it as prostitution, they don't realise that some of us have actually paid roora. The Shona people recognise a wife who is known to all family members. I paid roora so that I have rights over children born to this relationship, although they remain a secret to the entire family.

Although no families were involved here, as is usually the case, the *roora* paid by the male partner to the parents of the woman in the *small house* relationship serves the same purpose: to show appreciation for the woman's parents for raising the woman and according the husband rights over the children (Mangena & Ndlovu, 2013:475). Although *roora* is paid in some *small house* relationships, the man does not involve his relatives in the *roora* payment process and rituals. Thus, where *roora* is paid in *small house* relationships, it is paid secretly to the woman's parents. However, as has already been pointed out, for the Shona people marriage is a contract between two families and not individual lovers. Seen from this angle, *small house* relationships become illegitimate unions and as such relationships are not sanctioned by Shona society, hence there is bound to be a myriad of social problems. The social problems associated with *small house* relationships are dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 6.

From an African feminist perspective, the Shona cultural practice of *roora* creates gender inequalities and asymmetrical relations in marriage institutions. Women's perceptions seem to highlight that payment of *roora* by men compromises their bargaining power in marital relationships. Some women feel it reduces them to a commodity while giving the man an upper hand in negotiations for social exchanges in a marital relationship (Goredema, 2010; Mawere & Mawere, 2010; Fuseni & Dodoo, 2012:3; Meekers, 1993:3). The payment of *roora* becomes a transaction that accords men the power and the mandate to set the conditions for the marital relationship. Thus, *roora* gives men in Shona society a competitive edge in bargaining for social exchanges in *small house* relationships. However as already mentioned, *roora* remains cherished by some people in the Shona society as well as other African societies. To this end Shope (2006:66) observes that *lobolo* is a symbol of respect and acts as a woman's charter of liberty, upholding the worthiness of women. Similarly, from a traditional Shona cultural perspective, some arguments are made that *roora* attaches value to a woman and accords her certain status (Sithole, 2005:13-14; Nkosi, 2011:8). The issue of *roora* in Shona society thus becomes a contested terrain informed by dialectical perceptions attached to tradition and

modernity. The fact that very few men in the *small house* relationships had paid *roora* may signify a lack of reverence of such relationships among the Shona. The dialectical perceptions of *roora* payment could partially explain the myriad of social problems associated with *small house* relationships explored in Chapter 6.

5.7 CONCLUSION

Although the *Small house* relationship in contemporary Shona society tends to be informed and mediated by the ideals of Shona traditional polygynous marital practices, it differs in important respects with polygyny. *Small house* relationships can be seen as innovations by men to come up with relationships which are seen to be compatible with the 21st century. At a time when the demise of polygyny is expected, these practices are seen to be enduring through changing times and circumstances, albeit as disguised relationships. However, through the changing socio-cultural, socio-political and socioeconomic contexts there have been a noticeable number of continuities and discontinuities in Shona traditional marital practices. Labour migrancy or the diaspora phenomenon, reverence for marriage and motherhood by the Shona people, sexual gratification, a desire for more children by men (often of the opposite sex to those of their children within their legal marriage) and the Marriage Act 5:11 have all been seen as causes of the *small house* relationships. For most women, the *small house* relationship is seen as another option after attempts to enter or stay in a formal marriage have failed. It is important to note that women's agency and autonomy in these relationships may not be undermined as some women have been seen to dictate the conditions of the relationship. It is also argued here that the non-payment of *roora* for women in *small house* relationships makes it difficult for the Shona to accept them as a sanctified marital relationship. On the other hand, perceptions by some African feminists show that the payment of *roora* reduces women's autonomy in relationships (Nkosi, 2011:33; Sithole, 2005:14; Fuseni & Dodoo, 2012:3) and that compromises their bargaining power in a marital relationship (Blau, 1964:138). This is debatable though; *roora* is still perceived by some women to show appreciation and maintains a woman's integrity and dignity. From a social exchange perspective, the endurance of a marital relationship depends on perceived reciprocal and mutual benefits by both parties involved. It is against this backdrop that it is argued here that the proliferation of the *small house* relationship in the Shona society is a result of perceived mutual and reciprocal social exchanges. In any case, human beings have agency; the *small house* relationship becomes an emerging relationship structure through social interaction between men and women in Shona

society. The dynamics and complexities of the *small house* phenomenon are deeply entrenched in Shona culture and have become very subtle in the contemporary Shona society.

Having explored the nature, causes and justifications for *small house* relationships, the next Chapter explores the challenges experienced in *small house* relationships in the contemporary Shona society.

CHAPTER 6

CHALLENGES AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN *SMALL HOUSE* RELATIONSHIPS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As expounded in the preceding Chapter, the traditional Shona marital practice of polygyny and the *small house* relationship have some similarities and inconsistencies which make it difficult to conclude that polygyny has transformed into the *small house* relationship. Unlike polygyny, the *small house* relationship tends to be compounded by a myriad of challenges and social problems because largely it remains an unsanctioned sexual relationship. From the different interviews conducted with men and women in *small house* relationships, it emerged that social problems and challenges experienced in *small house* relationships include financial constraints, gender-based violence or domestic violence, exposure to HIV and AIDS, and stress caused by suspicion of infidelity. The secretiveness of the *small house* relationship tends to exacerbate the complexity of the context for these social problems. Some of the challenges have been noted as being peculiar to either men or women in *small house* relationships. Given that the relationship tends to be inundated by a myriad of social problems, one then wonders why there seems to be a proliferation of the *small house* phenomenon. From a social exchange perspective, the endurance of a marital relationship depends on perceived mutual and reciprocal benefits by the parties involved. It is therefore argued in this Chapter that although the *small house* relationship tends to be inundated by a myriad of social problems, the parties involved still perceive mutual and reciprocal benefits. Thus, as the Chapter explores the challenges associated with *small house* relationships, it also expounds on the perceived benefits in such relationships. In doing so, the Chapter addresses the research sub-question: **What challenges and benefits are experienced by partners in the *small house* household?**

6.2 FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

The most pervasive challenge across all *small house* relationships has to do with constrained financial resources. However, as was noted in Chapter 2 on polygyny and Chapter 5 on the *small house* relationship, a man had to be relatively financially stable to take another woman for a wife or partner. This was the case with most men who were interviewed; at the point of entry into the *small house* relationship they were financially stable. It is argued in this Chapter that the decade (2000–2009) of economic meltdown and the political crisis in Zimbabwe

(Sadomba 2011) had ripple effects on life styles and marriage institutions. It is clear from the views expressed by the men and women in *small house* relationships that supporting two households financially or materially has become a mammoth task for most men in *small house* relationships.

During an interview, Manuel shared his experience:

The most critical problem that I am facing now has to do with financial constraints. With my original wife we have three children and the last born is still in school. For the house where I live with my family I need \$250 for rentals, water and electricity bills. The small house wife needs \$150 for rentals and other bills. The fees for the two children amount to \$200 per term. What about food for both families? I hardly realise \$300 as profit per month from my small enterprise. To make matters worse my small house wife is too demanding. She forgets I have another family. So balancing provisions for the two families is really a challenge.

In another interview, Vengai shared a similar experience to Manuel:

This small house woman of mine demands a lot of things especially money, but my 'pocket' may not be able to meet her demands. As you can see the economic situation at the moment is very bad. Everyone is in a difficult situation but she seems oblivious of the situation. She wants to make sure that her demands are met at all cost. It's very stressful. She also seems not to understand that I have another family, a bigger one for that matter. Like I told you, with my original wife we have four children all of them are going to school. I pay a total of \$1 000 per term in fees. I also need \$400 for rentals and bills for both families. Remember I told you I am a civil servant with a gross salary of \$550. Food for both families is around \$250 per month. My small house woman behaves as if she is in a competition and would like to be the winner all the time.

Vengai's laments were echoed by John who was once a successful accountant with a company in Harare:

Because of the unstable economic situation, I am beginning to experience a new challenge I have never experienced before. Money has become a problem and things are difficult for everyone. Business is no longer viable and this has threatened my job as a buyer. I am beginning to experience problems in providing for the two families. To make matters worse, there are things that my wife would forgo if I said I had no

money, but from the day she discovered a text message to my small house woman, she no longer tolerate any excuse. I am in a fix, my brother. My monthly bills for rentals, electricity and water amount to \$1 500 for the two families and I hardly realise half that amount per month. I am contemplating moving to the high density suburbs where accommodation is cheaper.

Sentiments relating to constrained and unbalanced budgets for both families were conspicuous in most of the responses given by men in *small house* relationships. They all agreed that a *small house* relationship drains one's pocket and that supporting two families financially is a daunting task. *Small house* women also seem to agree that supporting two families is quite a challenge. Adiona, one of the *small house* women, revealed:

The other challenge is financial constraints. Urban life is too demanding hence it becomes quite a challenge for men to support two families. For instance my partner is renting a full house for his family where he pays \$250. I have two rooms and I expect him to pay \$100. There are also things like food, water and electricity bills, and transport for children to school. When such expenses are coupled with school fees, it becomes an insurmountable task for the provider. I want to emphasise that financial constraints or overstretched resources is a critical source of conflict between men and women in an intimate relationship.

It is observed that everybody involved acknowledged the fact that the first wife and her children would receive more money. It seems that is part of the tacit arrangement; if you are a *small house* woman you would have made this calculation from the start. During interviews, Kaycee, another *small house* woman, also shared her experience:

In my case my partner has since abdicated his financial support responsibilities. He no longer pays rentals, water and electricity bills. His visits to my place have become so erratic and unpredictable, and when he comes, it's just for a little while. He gives preference to his wife and children. For me and my children, he brings whatever would be left after buying groceries for his original family. Remember I told you that I have a child with another man, and now I have two more children with this man. School fees for our children mount to \$500 per term. I also need \$200 for rentals, water and electricity bills, and another \$100 for food per month. I am only a vendor, how does he expect me to meet all these expenses. I am actually contemplating suing him for maintenance.

Generally, sentiments expressed by men and women in *small house* relationships reveal that the financial resources to support two households tend to be overstretched; hence men face challenges in meeting the demands of the two families. Under such harsh economic conditions, women's agency is reflected when they resort to vending as a survival strategy. More so, the fact that Kaycee contemplates suing her partner for maintenance shows that women are not passive partners in *small house* relationships. When asked to explain some of the challenges experienced in *small house* relationships, Wilbert said:

The first challenge has to do with money. In my case when the small house relationship started, I had a very small family. My children were not going to school, so I could afford a few dollars to spare. But as I speak all my children, including those from the small house woman, are going to school. I have too many children to send to school. What about rentals, water and electricity bills for both families. I need a monthly budget of \$900 and I am only a truck driver. A small house relationship is not sustainable.

It is observed that financial constraints are a common challenge with most men in *small house* relationships and Tichaona is no exception; he explained:

Some small house women do not understand that at times things are difficult and that you may fail to adequately provide for their needs. They insist on their needs, so balancing the two families becomes a real challenge. They are so demanding that if you are not very careful you can neglect your family or even divorce your wife. The truth of the matter is that under these economic conditions it is very difficult to provide for two families.

Tawanda concurs with other male participants, explaining:

What I am telling you is the truth; the small house relationship involves a lot of emotional stress. The small house woman is too demanding and you have no peace at all. The major problem is that the small house woman does not accept that at times I have no money. If I say I don't have money she starts accusing me of having relationships with other women. At times, I contemplate quitting the relations but this has serious implications because she may decide to come to my house and humiliate me in front of my family. So the struggle is to make sure that she is well provided for and the relationship remains a secret.

Sentiments expressed by men and women in *small house* relationships revealed serious financial constraints experienced by members in such households. The scenarios given by men reveal serious budgetary constraints that may lead to these men experiencing severe stress. From an African feminist perspective, perceptions on femininity tend to deprive women to see other opportunities outside marriage and tend rely too much on men (Gaidzanwa, 2010; Goredema, 2010; Ahikire, 2014:9). However, such views may not be generalised as women's agency is reflected in the way they engage in some work in the informal sector to contribute to the provisions of the household; though in a small way. As argued in Chapter 5, despite the fact that many of the women do have some form of income-generating job, it is the men who are expected to provide the bulk of the financial support. This is where the traditional polygynous marital practice was a better option compared to *small house* relationships. Polygyny was compatible with the socioeconomic dispensation of the time, as wives and children constituted the labour force to work on the lands (Boserup, 2007:25; Zeitzen, 2008:2; Aluko & Aransiola, 2003:176). In such marital arrangements wives did not have to wait for the husband to provide them with food but worked to sustain themselves and their children. Also during the colonial times, women were seen to be the main providers of the household as men engaged in exploitative migrant labour (Schmidt, 1986 & 1992). Unlike polygyny, the *small house* relationship is largely an urban phenomenon and urban life has been seen to be economically demanding. The competition for jobs and selling goods is extremely high. What we see here is the incompatibility between the *small house* relationship as an addition to a marital relationship and the contemporary socioeconomic dispensation. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the *small house* relationship is clandestinely maintained; hence resources cannot be shared openly and equitably.

It is observed that the financial resources between the 'main' house and the *small house* households tend to be overstretched, leaving households impoverished because all members of the two households tend to depend on one working man (although in some cases there are financial contributions from women). The interview with Kaycee above shows that she and her children live in abject poverty. The *small house* household thus becomes inundated with problems as a result of financial constraints as the husband is expected to provide financial and material resources for both households. The feminisation of poverty becomes an entrenched phenomenon of most typical single-parent households. In this regard, Moghadam (2005:6) observes that the feminisation of poverty as a phenomenon is widespread in single parent households in developing nations, Zimbabwe included. However, the *small house* household

should be treated with caution here because it is not fully a single parent household since there is a partner who makes occasional visits and financial contributions.

The financial situation in *small house* households tends to be exacerbated by the fact that most women in these relationships are not gainfully employed. This is not surprising because the normative script in the Shona culture prescribes dichotomous gender roles where women are relegated to small income-generating projects or jobs (Kambarami, 2006; Munson & Saulnier, 2006). It is because of such gender role socialisation that some sociologists argue that poverty wears a woman's face. It is therefore argued that because of certain cultural prescriptions, women have less access to land, credit, capital and jobs with good incomes and this exposes them to poverty (Moghadam, 2005:8-9). In addition, many of the women in this study did not have high levels of formal education (as explained above) and hence did not have the labour market skills and qualifications required for better paying jobs.

One would then wonder why *small house* relationships tend to endure and proliferate if women in such relationships seem to suffer from poverty. Arguments proffered by social exchange theorists such as Blau (1964) and Homans (1961) would highlight that relationships can only endure if parties involved perceive mutual and reciprocal gains in that relationship. Similarly, *small house* relationships become attractive and justified by perceived mutual and reciprocal benefits. The juxtaposition of the pains and gains in *small house* relationships reveals that the *small house* relationship is beneficial to both men and women.

In the Shona culture when a marriage is not working and the man is not supporting the family, it is common to hear women saying '*ndogarira vana vangu*' meaning 'I will stay put for the sake of my children' (Masasire, 1996; Chavhunduka, 1979). As expounded in Chapter 5, children are an important resource for women in marital relationships and women are prepared to suffer in such a relationship for the sake of their children. It can also be observed that in terms of social exchange theory, in such relationships women hope for benefits for their children, hence they seem not to complain. This partially explains why marriages, including stable informal relationships like the *small house* relationship, do not break up easily, even if the man of the house fails to provide financially or materially. Historically, some men in Zimbabwe engaged in migrant labour, where they would go to countries like South Africa and Zambia to work on the mines (some worked in local mines) for years (Hattori et al, 2010:8; Ferguson, 1999:49); some of them never remitted money back home but still found their wives waiting for them when they returned. This reflects women's ability to take care of themselves

and children. Although financial support remains an important resource in social exchanges, *small house* relationships tend to endure with limited resources because men capitalise on women's culture of silence. There is need to be very cautious here, because women's silence may not be perceived as a sign of weakness but a sign of resistance to the oppressive cultural practices condoned by men. Nonetheless, such cultural practices are challenged by African feminists and hence they advocate for the empowerment of girls and women to stand up for their rights (Ahikire, 2014; Goredema, 2010). From the normative script of Shona culture, being quiet and receptive of orders is characteristic of a well-brought-up woman (expectations of emphasised femininity); hence some men take advantage of this to abdicate their responsibility as financial providers.

The next section explores gender-based violence as another social problem in the context of the *small house* households.

6.3 GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SMALL HOUSE RELATIONSHIPS

Within the Shona culture, conflict tends to be accepted as an inherent characteristic of marriage institutions. The Shona proverbial saying, *chakafukidza dzimba matenga* (marriage is characterised by a lot of social problems but couples keep it to themselves) sums this up (Gelfand, 1979; Masasire, 1996). This Shona proverb tends to justify gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence, which is normally perpetrated by husbands over wives. In the Shona culture, the social construction of masculinity hinges on aggressiveness and patriarchal hegemony (Kambarami, 2006). As discussed in Chapter 2, hegemonic masculinity tends to legitimise patriarchy which is taken to guarantee the dominant position of men and subordinate position of women. This partially explains why some men resort to solving their problems with violence. The secretive nature of the *small house* relationship exacerbates opportunities for conflict among the parties involved. It was also observed that the incompatibility between this emerging family structure and the contemporary socioeconomic dispensation could be a source of conflict between the partners in *small house* relationships. As expounded in the preceding section, constrained financial resources are another source of conflict. The acceptance of violence perpetrated by men as a norm in Shona culture is an issue challenged by African feminists (Kolawole, 1997). Gender-based violence in *small house* relationships takes different forms with the woman as its victim; as such, it tends to undermine the integrity, rights and autonomy of women. A report carried by H-Metro reveals the extent to which the *small house* phenomenon has become a social problem in Zimbabwe. In this

incident, a *small house* woman in Harare drinks rat poison after nude pictures with a married man leaks on a mobile social network group. The *small house* woman who survived the suicide attempt said, “I failed to stomach it after someone posted the photographs in our group chat and people made their comments” (H-Metro, Wednesday 9 July 2014). Such challenges are a result of the secretive nature of the *small house* relationship. During a follow-up interview, Kaycee shared her experiences:

One day I had a serious altercation with my partner over his long absence which deteriorated into a fight. He assaulted me physically using fists and open hands. That very night we had sex against my will. When I went to the hospital the following day, he persuaded me to tell nurses that I had been attacked by robbers who broke into our house.

Although women seem to suffer in silence in the context of marital or sexual relationships, in some situations silence may demonstrate a strategy to pacify male violence. In this regard Parpart and Kabeer (2010:1) argue that the uncritical identification of silence with disempowerment obscures the potential of many subtle strategies attempting to resist male dominance. Silence may also demonstrate dissatisfaction with the relationship.

Many of the issues related to gender-based violence in marital or sexual relationships can be inferred from Kaycee’s response. It is clear that gender-based violence could be a result of stereotypical hegemonic constructions of masculinity which tend to be pervasive in the Shona culture (Kambarami, 2006; Langa, 2012). Such social constructions of masculinity also entail aggressive sexuality culminating in sexual harassment and sexual objectification in intimate relationships. The incident cited above is illustrative; after brutally assaulting his partner, he forces her to be intimate with him. In other words, he rapes his partner. As may also be seen from the incident above, gender-based violence can take many forms including physical, emotional and sexual abuse. In the Shona culture if there are such problems in legal marital relationships, the wife seeks counselling from a *tete* (father’s sister) who often says: “All men are the same” (Kambarami, 2006:10). In doing so, they condone and perpetuate gender-based violence in marital relationships. Women in *small house* relationships are in an even worse predicament when seeking outside help, since her relationship is not even acknowledged by family members. Such violent practices are challenged by African feminists (Amadiume, 1987; Kolawole, 1997) because men tend to hide behind a façade of an ‘our culture’ discourse. Similarly, in another interview, Adiona shared her experiences in a *small house* relationship:

I tell you this relationship is emotionally stressful. There is a nasty incident that happened between my partner's wife and me. Firstly, I am not allowed to phone my 'husband' when he is at his house. Secondly, I only phone on a line he keeps at his work place. But this time around because we had had misunderstandings over payment of bills, I phoned on his original number telling him that I was tired of being kept a secret. We had a serious altercation over the phone and his wife suspected that he was seeing someone else. She picked my number from her husband's phone and the next day she phoned me pretending to be a client who wanted to buy some bearings. I directed her to my workplace. She came with her three sisters and gave me a thorough beating. I was humiliated in front of my work mates. What hurts me is that they were calling me a whore, yet this man also paid roora for me. When my 'husband' came home later in the day, he also beat me thoroughly blaming me for causing the conflict.

Similarly, Chipso shared her experiences during an interview:

I had a confrontation with my 'husband's' wife at the funeral of our mother-in-law. I am sure you remember I told you that we have twins in this relationship. So my 'husband' had insisted that the twins need to attend their grandmother's funeral. Unfortunately when we got there, we had a serious altercation. His wife had just learnt that the twins were her husband's children with another woman. She was very furious and was determined to fight me. Fortunately she was restrained by people at the funeral. I was taken to another homestead where I sought refuge for the night and returned to Harare the following day. It was while I was at this homestead when my 'husband' followed and gave me a thorough beating, blaming me for being careless by letting his wife know that the twins were his children.

In both incidents, violence takes place between a woman and another woman. However, it must be understood that both women are fighting for a man; hence understanding power dynamics between women who are placed differently in the social structure remains critical. In another interview, Omega also shared her experience of domestic violence:

Maintaining the relationship as a secret is quite a challenge. I told my sister about my relationship with Sam. When my sister met Sam, she asked him for how long he would want to keep the relationship a secret. This did not go down well with Sam. We had a serious altercation over this issue which deteriorated into a fight. That's when I

fractured this left arm (raising the arm) and I had serious problems seeking medical assistance. He never assisted in paying the medical bills.

As noted from the three interviews and the report in the H-Metro, conflict can be perceived as an inherent feature in some *small house* relationships. This is mainly caused by the secretive nature of the relationship. From such a perspective; *small house* relationships may compromise the integrity, security and autonomy of women. These *small house* women tended to be blamed for causing problems and yet it was not entirely their fault. When asked why she didn't report the abuse to the police Omega simply said:

He is the father of my child and I expect him to continue supporting us. So by reporting him, I am creating more problems.

It is argued here that women in *small house* relationships suffer abuse because of poverty. Similarly, men in *small house* relationship confirmed that the relationship is characterised by conflict. During an interview Vengai had this to say:

Another challenge is that the small house relationship is characterised by a lot of conflicts. At one point my wife suspected that I was seeing someone else. She had picked it on Whats App chats with my small house woman. We had a serious altercation over the issue and as she continued nagging me, I slapped her in the face. I actually regret my action because this has affected my marital relationship tremendously. She is always moody and not happy at all. So, the big challenge is to maintain the relationship a secret so as to avoid conflicts.

This shows that violence is not restricted to the woman in the *small house* relationship, but also extends to the wife of the man in *small house* relationship. Another interview with Manuel also confirms that conflict or violence is a characteristic inherent in many *small house* relationships:

I have quarrelled several times with my wife over my small house relationship. In January this year, we had such a serious conflict. My wife went to our rural home and I slept out on each and every night she was away. When she came back she got the wind from neighbours and we had serious altercations for some days. I also had a serious argument with my small house woman because I suspected that she was seeing someone else. I gave her a thorough beating over the issue. So you see, there are conflicts after conflicts.

In common with the other cases above, Manuel's response points to a relationship that threatens the stability of the family and the marital institution. Such conflicts tend to have ripple effects on the behaviour and personality of children growing up in such environments. The behaviour or personality of children growing up in *small house* households is explored in greater detail in Chapter 7.

When asked whether John also experienced conflicts in his *small house* relationship he said:

I will start by saying conflicts are a common feature in every marital relationship, although it seems to be worse in small house relationships. I have observed that sources of conflict are different in the two households (main house and small house). For the main house, conflicts arise when the wife discovers that the man is cheating; but for the small house, conflicts arise when the man fails to meet his financial obligations. In my case, there was an issue concerning a text message that was discovered by my wife. The message was reminding me to pay for our child in the nursery school because I had failed to raise the fees. We had a serious altercation over this message; unfortunately I ended up beating her because she had stretched me to the limit. I also had another serious conflict with my small house woman, when I couldn't pay rentals and bills. When I finally paid her a visit she threw tantrums; again I had to beat her to silence her. At times that's the language women understand.

The excerpts from the interviews above reveal that that some men in the Shona culture think that violence brings solutions to the problems in the family and that they are justified to use physical violence against women. This could be a result of the social construction of hegemonic masculinity in the Shona culture which associates manhood with aggressiveness (Langa, 2012; Kambarami, 2006). To this end, John sees wife battering as a solution to the problems in his relationships.

Another interview with Rudo, a *small house* woman who is formally employed, showed a different source of conflict.

Conflicts are very common in small house relationships because men have a problem. They want to treat us differently. For instance, they buy groceries for their families, and then they come here with residues. Personally I won't allow it. We have quarrelled a lot over budgetary concerns. I also have children, they want to eat, and they must be sent to school, just like their counterparts in the other family of his. My 'husband'

knows that when he gets violent, I also get violent or I simply report him to the police. One day he had to sleep in the police cells after he kicked me on the abdomen and at that time I was heavy with pregnancy.

Such aggressiveness can be explained in the context of hegemonic constructions of masculinity in the Shona culture where men associate aggressive behaviour with manhood (Kambarami, 2006). This partially explains the existence of spousal violence in the context of marital relationships. However, the actions taken by Rudo to report the man to the police shows the assertiveness and agency by some women to protect their rights and integrity.

Another interview with Muchaneta indicates that gender-based violence in *small house* relationships is fuelled by lack of trust and suspicions of infidelity, especially on the man's part, because the *small house* woman lives alone most the time.

One day a brother of mine paid me a visit; as he was smoking, he left some cigarette stubs in my house. Those stubs sparked a serious argument with my 'husband' when he came that evening. He was accusing me of having a sexual relationship with another man. I had to seek refuge from a neighbour for the night after receiving a thorough beating.

It is observed here that almost all participants acknowledged that *small house* relationships are characterised by gender-based violence particularly domestic violence and that women are usually the victims. Responses from different interviews involving men and women in *small house* relationships reveal relationships that are characterised by domestic violence. As already mentioned, the secretive nature of the relationship makes it susceptible to violence. The perceptions on masculinity and femininity, in the Shona culture, seem to condone violence (especially perpetuated by men) as the norm in marriage (Masasire, 1996; Tatira, 1998; Bourdillon, 1998). In this regard Connell (1997:191) presupposes that masculinity is a product of social construction that is forever being constructed in every context; the *small house* relationship becomes more susceptible to domestic violence because the partners involved live separate lives, resulting in suspicions of infidelity. Men would like to silence the women and reduce incidents of infidelity through violence because being violent is characteristic of masculinity in the Shona culture (Kambarami, 2006). Such stereotypical perceptions of masculine power in the marriage institution are challenged by African feminists because they undermine the very humanity of women (Kolawole, 1997; Ahikire, 2014; Gaidzanwa, 2010 & Goredema, 2003). Gender-based violence in the context of *small house* relationships tends to

be perpetuated also by inadequate support by the man who has two households to support. The various interviews with men and women in *small house* relationships and the different cases cited in newspapers revealed that women are largely victims of gender-based violence. Thus, the patriarchal hegemony entrenched in Shona culture becomes the major source of gender-based violence in *small house* relationships. However, it is important to note that there are women in *small house* relationships (although very few) who are assertive and resist the violence perpetuated by men as is the case with Rudo.

As has been observed in the different interviews, lack of financial resources increases women's susceptibility to gender-based violence. The study thus reveals that when a man fails to provide for the family he becomes violent and tries to mediate the course of the relationship through coercion. Views expressed by participants in different interviews indicate that the nature and conditions of the *small house* relationships are set by men, and this exposes an entrenched patriarchal hegemony in Shona culture which reduces women to minors (Rutoro, 2012). Ironically, instead of women blaming their husbands for irresponsible behaviour, they blame the other woman who also happens to be a victim of circumstances. Women's suffering in *small house* relationships should be attributed to perceptions in Shona culture which associates femininity with submissiveness and subservience (Rutoro, 2012; Kambarami, 2006). It is no wonder that African feminists are keen to challenge such cultural perceptions and vow to fight such feminine attitudes created under the guise of cultural ideals.

Besides physical assault, certain participants coerced women to be intimate with them. A case in point is Kaycee's experience; after having been assaulted physically, she was coerced to be intimate with her partner. However, the term 'marital rape' does not exist in the Shona culture; men believe sex, including forced sex, is their right (Sithole, 2005:11; Machakanja, 2004; Zeitzen, 2008). According to Heise, Ellsberg and Gottomoelle (1999), rape is a form of gender-based violence and as such it increases opportunities for contracting HIV because in situations of rape, conversations about safe sex are less likely to take place. Also, if the man forces entry and the woman is not ready or is unwilling to have sex, she may experience bleeding and tearing of the genital area creating passage ways for HIV to enter the bloodstream. The study therefore reveals how the conflictual nature of *small house* relationships increases the partners' susceptibility to HIV and AIDS. What we see here is the interplay between structures of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity perpetuating the subordination of women in marital or sexual relationships. It is against this backdrop that the Zimbabwean government enacted the Domestic Violence Act of 2007; to protect women against physical, sexual and

emotional abuse by men in marital relationships. Despite the *small house* relationship being seemingly characterised by conflict, paradoxically, there seems to be a proliferation of *small house* relationships in the contemporary Shona society. From a social exchange perspective, women tend to endure exploitative and conflict-ridden relationships because they lack an alternative option (Wang, 2004:3; Nakonezny & Denton, 2008:404; Macdonald, 1981:826). The emancipation of women from subordination will require both men and women to change their mind-set; there is need for men and women to deconstruct stereotypical perceptions on masculinity and femininity respectively.

Generally, gender-based violence in the context of *small house* relationships continues to be fuelled by unequal economic statuses between men and women and this may create a fertile ground for contracting HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases through sexual harassment (Langa, 2012; Kambarami, 2006). Over-stretched resources and suspicions of infidelity have been seen to be the major sources of conflict in *small house* relationships in this study. The next section explores the nexus between HIV and AIDS and *small house* relationships.

6.4 THE SMALL HOUSE RELATIONSHIP AND HIV AND AIDS

One of the critical challenges posed by *small house* relationships is that it creates fertile ground for the transmission of HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). A survey by UNAIDS (2015) in Zimbabwe found that more women than men are infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. The gender dynamics in the context of *small house* relationships may make women susceptible to HIV and AIDS due to unequal gender relations in these relationships. This section therefore explores how gender-based violence increases the chances of contracting HIV and AIDS by women in *small house* relationships. This then brings us to an exposition on the notion that more women than men are affected by HIV and AIDS in the context of *small house* relationships. Based on the sentiments expressed by men and women in *small house* relationships, there seems to be serious suspicions of infidelity by the parties involved. What is interesting is how women, their bodies and sexuality become increasingly commodified (Sithole 2005:14) in the context of *small house* relationships. My follow-up interview with Tonderai reveals:

The other problem is that you suffer psychologically because most of the time you are worried whether the small house woman is not seeing someone else. In fact I suspect that my small house woman is seeing someone else. I have never caught her or

discovered anything yet, but my sixth sense tells me she is having an affair with someone. If it is true, then I run the risk of contracting HIV and AIDS. The problem is that I treat her as my wife, so I never use condoms at all.

Tonderai exhibits emotional conflict and at the same time he is susceptible to HIV because he does not think of ways to have safe sex. Multiple concurrent sexual relationships render the people engaged in them at risk of contracting HIV and thus pose a danger (Chingandu 2008; Hattori et al 2008; SAFAIDS 2009). Furthermore, in quasi-permanent relationships like *small house* unions, partners usually do not use protection when having sex.

Another follow-up interview with Kaycee indicated that her partner was no longer visiting her; when he does, he only stays for 20 or 30 minutes. When asked whether she does not think of looking for another sexual partner she said:

‘Ehe’ because you need money, you end up looking for another partner to assist paying rentals, water and electricity bills as well as school fees for children. I know there are problems with multiple concurrent sexual partners but at times you are left with no option.

Kaycee may already have other sexual partners and such practices can fuel the spread of HIV and AIDS. She uses sex as a resource in exchange for material items and money. The *small house* relationship thus tends to expose the parties involved to the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

During an interview John shared his sentiments in this regard:

I don’t trust my small house woman; it’s very difficult to trust someone who stays alone most of the time. Sometimes I pay her surprise visits during the night just to check on her. To say the truth when this relationship started, we used to use condoms but from the time she fell pregnant we never used condoms. She has since become my second ‘wife’

A dangerous practice in some *small house* relationships is that partners get used to each other and do not use condoms to protect themselves from possible infection by STIs. Ironically, John does not trust his partner and yet he doesn’t protect himself from possible infection. This means that John’s original wife is also susceptible to contracting STIs including HIV and AIDS.

During another interview when Tichaona was asked whether he trusted his *small house* woman, he stated:

You talk of trust or being faithful, I am not worried about that. I don't care what she does with her time. I know she could be having other boyfriends; that's not my business. What I know she has my child and I go there whenever I have chance to do so. Because she is just a small house and that I never paid roora for her, I don't look for too many things. Remember, I told you this woman is a soldier, she is difficult to control.

Tichaona's relationship is risky and renders him susceptible to HIV; he is not even concerned about what his partner does with her time. In addition, Tichaona's perception of a *small house* is influenced by him not paying *roora* and hence he states he does not have control over her. This reiterates the significance of *roora* in the Shona culture; it stabilises marriage and enhances fidelity in a marital relationship on the part of the woman whose parents received *roora* (Mangena & Ndlovu 2013; Masasire 1996). Thus, from a Shona cultural perspective, *roora* may promote fidelity on the part of women which may minimise the chances of contracting STIs including HIV, although it is of course not certain. However, it is observed that men's promiscuous behaviour may not be controlled by the payment of *roora*; if anything, it gives them the power to manipulate a sexual relationship. In other words, the practice of *roora* enhances the hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity; hence the perpetuation of women's subordination. It is also suggested, from views expressed by Tichaona that women who are not financially dependent on men may have more power to mediate the nature and direction of the relationship compared to financially dependent women.

Small house relationships can form multiple concurrent sexual relationships that are risky and expose the partners involved to HIV and other STIs. For instance, when Wilbert was asked whether his *small house* relationship is the only one he said:

She is the only one with children. I have another small house woman but we don't have children together, she has a child with another man. She stays out of Harare and I occasionally pay her visits.

Wilbert's concurrent sexual relationships potentially expose all parties involved to HIV. When he says that he occasionally visits his second *small house* it means that the woman is left alone most of the time and may decide to look for other sexual partners, thereby exposing everyone in these relationships to contracting STIs including HIV.

It was surprising to note that for some men and women the *small house* relationship is actually perceived as a way to minimise the chances of contracting HIV. During an interview, Alfred exposes:

I realised that as a man, I need a number of sexual conquests. I also don't like to be like other men who go to the pubs looking for sexual partners. That is a very risky practice as one can contract some sexually transmitted infections including HIV and AIDS. So, I want partners who are reliably mine. That's why I looked for this small house woman in addition to the polygynous family I have.

Alfred has multiple sexual partners which increases opportunities for all the participants' susceptibility to STIs including HIV and AIDS. Omega seems to share the same sentiments as Alfred when she says:

If you fail to secure a husband of your own, it would be better to have a stable relationship, even with a married man. As a small house, I wait for my man for sexual gratification and that's all. What is bad is to change sexual partners one after the other; that's prostitution and it increases chances of contracting HIV and AIDS.

What Omega is saying could be true to a certain extent but it is equally important to realise that *small house* relationships create multiple concurrent relationships that are detrimental and risky as they create more opportunities for contracting STIs including HIV and AIDS.

From the various interviews conducted with the men and women in *small house* relationships, it emerged that such relationships increase the susceptibility of parties involved to HIV and AIDS. In this regard, women in Zimbabwe continue to face the violation of their sexual rights because of a historically produced and artificially maintained discourse of 'our culture' or 'our tradition' (Kambarami, 2006). Such a discourse not only entitles men to women's bodies but also exposes women to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The social construction of masculinity in the context of African culture in general and Shona culture in particular imbues men with toughness, restrictive emotionality and sexual virility (Uchendu, 2008; Zeitzen 2008:61; Kambarami 2006). Such perceptions tend to characterise women's bodies as sexual objects built for male pleasure and gratification.

It is observed that the conditions attached to having sex are set by men and because of stereotypical perceptions of femininity in the Shona culture, women are unable to negotiate safe ways of having sex (Sithole, 2005:11). This is regrettable because even if the original wife

suspects that her husband could be having a *small house* relationship, she is not empowered to initiate the use of condoms. In Shona culture, if a woman takes the initiative in this respect, she is regarded as a woman of loose morals (SAFAIDS, 2010). It is important to note that most of the social problems faced by women are culture based; hence African feminists would want such cultural ideals and perceptions revised (Kolawole, 2001; Ahikire 2014; Gaidzanwa 2010; Goredema 2010). Against this backdrop, it can be concluded that in the Shona society more women than men tend to be infected and affected by the epidemic. Thus, the spread of HIV and AIDS in the context of *small house* relationships becomes a gendered phenomenon. This is regrettable, because generally men are more promiscuous than women (Kangéthe & Chikomo, 2014) and the *small house* phenomenon is a manifestation of the fact that men in the Shona society tend to undertake multiple sexual relationships.

As has already been mentioned, gender-based violence tends to be rooted in the historically unequal power relations between men and women in Shona culture. Therefore, gender-based violence in the context of *small house* relationships fosters the spread of HIV because it limits women's ability to negotiate safe sexual practices or to disclose their HIV status for fear of reprisal. As noted in a number of the interviews, gender-based violence can take many forms including physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Thus, gender-based becomes detrimental to the integrity and security of women in *small house* relationships. Because some women would want to use sex as a social exchange resource for the provision of survival needs, they are exposed to STIs, including HIV and AIDS. If the *small house* man fails to provide, some *small house* women have indicated that they have no option but to look for an alternative partner. It is against this backdrop that social exchange theory argues that a partner's dependence on a relationship depends on the partners' comparison level (Nakonezny & Denton, 2008:404). By implication, a *small house* woman may look for an alternative partner if she perceives inadequate benefits from her current relationship. In doing so, she creates opportunities for contracting HIV. The *small house* phenomenon thus remains a volatile relationship with serious challenges in contemporary Shona society.

The next section explores other challenges in *small house* relationships that are specifically related to the secretive aspect of the relationship.

6.5 THE SECRETIVE NATURE OF THE *SMALL HOUSE* RELATIONSHIP

The *small house* relationship as an emerging relationship structure among the Shona people tends to be beset by a number of challenges that are of a general nature. Such challenges may

threaten the stability of the family institution. During interviews, some participants indicated that they have no peace in *small house* relationships. When asked about some of the challenges he was facing in his *small house* relationship, Tawanda explained:

With small house relationships, you have no peace. She wants me to divorce my wife and she always threatens me that she will come out in the open to humiliate me. I am also not free with my phone. One day I forgot it at home and my wife had an opportunity to read all the Whats App chats with my small house woman. She now stalks me because she suspects I have an affair with someone else. We quarrel a lot over this issue. Because the chances of visiting my small house woman are now limited, she also continues nagging me about my continual absence. I have no peace at all.

It is quite clear here that in both cases *small house* relationships cause distress and disharmony in families. Tawanda is in a serious predicament; his situation is exacerbated by the fact that the *small house* relationship is kept a secret. The differences between polygyny and *small house* relationships are thus highlighted in these cases. In traditional Shona society, polygynous marriage was through consensus and at times it was initiated by the first wife (Tatira 2010; Gelfand 1973; Bourdillon 1998). Although polygyny has its own challenges, such transparency minimised cases of conflicts in polygynous marital relationships.

Another interview with Beauty also revealed problems in terms of secrecy.

One other challenge is to maintain the relationship a secret. When the child falls ill during the night, I cannot communicate to the father. When there are important functions or ceremonies or even a funeral, I cannot attend to perform duties expected of a daughter-in-law in our culture. Another problem is that I cannot have my 'husband' when I need him. I have to wait until he comes at times which are convenient to him. Most of the time I have no one to talk to and share my troubles.

The dynamics in the *small house* relationship require great subtlety; the players have to be cautious as they play a game of hide and seek. During interviews Adiona had this to say:

When I look at the life I am leading, I can describe myself as a single woman. Just imagine that he visits us once or twice a month. I cannot have sex whenever I feel like doing so. Just imagine if I fell sick at night, I can't call him. To tell you the truth I am sick and tired to remain hidden forever. I am not even free to walk with my man, and whenever I get an opportunity to walk with him; I have to be very careful that people

who know us are not seeing us. I am always alert and have to make sure that we are not caught.

A follow-up interview with Tsikai also revealed:

The first problem has to do with balancing time; the small house woman also wants quality time with her man. If you don't provide that time she will look for other men. But then the challenge is to find a genuine reason to excuse myself from the original family. I am afraid that if the excuses become too frequent, my wife may become suspicious. With the small house relationship you have no peace, you are always afraid to be discovered.

It is apparent that the secretive nature of the *small house* relationship is the source of many of the social problems experienced by partners in such relationships. Partners in such relationships are torn between the dialectics of tradition and modernity. Through *small house* relationships, men engage in typical multiple concurrent relationships which tend to be shrouded in a myriad of social problems.

The sentiments expressed by men and women in *small house* relationships during the interviews point to a relationship compounded by subtle and delicate politics. Moreover, the social problems exposed by parties in *small house* relationships argue for a relationship that tends to be incompatible with the socio-political, socio-cultural and socioeconomic dispensations of contemporary Shona society.

Multiple concurrent sexual relationships tend to be problematic because of the changing times and circumstances. When juxtaposed with polygyny, the *small house* relationship is seen to be problematic because it is not sanctioned by Shona culture. Moreover, the social problems are exacerbated by the secretive nature of the relationship. It can be argued here that many of the problems expounded in this section could be avoided if the relationship was open and sanctioned by Shona culture. The dialectical discourse between tradition and modernity tends to create conflictual relationships between couples in the 'main' house and partners in the *small house*. As such the complexities or intricacies of the gender dynamics of the *small house* relationship are reflected in the diversity of the social problems expounded in this Chapter. Paradoxically, the proliferation of the *small house* relationships is conspicuous in Shona society. From a social exchange perspective, marital relationships (or intimate sexual relationships such as the *small house*) can only endure if the parties involved perceive mutual

and reciprocal benefits (Thibaut & Kelly in Sabatelli 1982:3). In other words, besides the challenges in *small house* relationships cited here, there are still perceived benefits for both parties involved in such relationships. It can thus be concluded that the opposing perceptions on marriage between modernity and tradition tend to mediate unceasing social problems experienced in *small house* relationships in the contemporary Shona society. The social problems in *small house* relationships tend to be exacerbated by the secretive nature of the relationship.

6.6 BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES IN SMALL HOUSE RELATIONSHIPS JUXTAPOSED

This section juxtaposes the benefits with the challenges experienced in *small house* relationships so as to develop a comprehensive understanding of the gender dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon. It is also important to understand the social exchanges that characterise and sustain such a typical multiple concurrent sexual relationship in the context of a seemingly incompatible socioeconomic dispensation. During an interview, Gararirimo shared his experiences:

In my case I don't want to lie, there are no benefits from small house relationships; not at all, it's just a question of lust. Maybe you get sexual satisfaction but basically it is lust. You waste a lot of money and resources. At times I spend up to \$400 per month on this relationship. I sometimes regret and think if I could use this money to finish some projects at my house. The problem is when you are in such a relationship it's difficult to quit, especially if there are children. Moreover, you get used to it and get stuck in the relationship.

Gararirimo thus sees more challenges than benefits in his *small house* relationship. John supports his sentiments and shared his experiences during interviews:

Looking at my scenario, challenges far outweigh benefits in small house relationships. Financial constraints, exposure to HIV and conflicts are some of the challenges one has to endure in a small house relationship. What you gain is sexual satisfaction and some bit of fun outside your home. 'Avo vamunotaura navo vachiti zvinofamba vanokunyeperai; chinhu chinonetsa ichi' (Those who tell you that small house is an easy relationship are liars; this relationship is problematic).

Like Gararirimo, John perceives more challenges than benefits in *small house* relationships. Vengai, another man in *small house* relationship, concurred:

It's quite true that there are more challenges than benefits in small house relationships. But when you are already in the relationship, there is very little that you can do, you simply have to face it. It is only out of lust that we as men seek such relationships. Financial constraints, conflicts and risks to HIV and AIDS are the major challenges that one has to contend with. In my case I was looking for a boy child; unfortunately both my children in the small house household are girls. Now I have the burden of sending them all to school.

Unlike the other men, Alfred had different perceptions of the benefits and challenges in *small house* relationships. He had this to say:

For me I think there are more benefits than challenges in small house relationships. You see, it's refreshing to have a sexual encounter outside the home. Small house women can give you romantic love. For the original wife, making love tends to be ritualistic without any creativity. That's the reason I have both a polygynous and a small house relationships. Those who complain, it's because they are financially weak. Small house relationship is a symbol of status; it's not for struggling men. It's a relationship for real men. Besides sexual gratification, I also have the number of children I want.

Alfred owns a haulage company and a number of hardware shops in the capital city. This could be the reason he does not feel the burden of the *small house* relationship. It is observed here that men do not agree on the gains and pains of the *small house* relationship. Chipso, a woman in *small house* relationship, agrees with some men that there are more challenges than benefits in such relationships. During the interviews she said:

As for me the only benefit I can talk of are children. I want to invest in them so that they will look after me in old age. You also know that people talk bad things when you don't have children. I hope my children will get good jobs or get married. Besides children, I don't see any benefit because the relationship is stressful and conflictual.

By contrast, most women in *small house* relationships perceive more benefits than challenges in the relationship. Rudo shares her views during interviews:

I think there are more benefits than challenges in small house relationships. One such benefit is that at least you have a partner and children and that's what society expects from every woman. It has to be appreciated that in Zimbabwe there are more women than men; so the best way is to share. The problem is with us women because we expect men to provide everything. As for me I am happy now, even though I know I could have been happier if I had secured a husband of my own.

Rudo's sentiments are a manifestation of alternative femininity which typifies the rejection and resistance with women's subordination (Schippers, 2007). In this regard, Muchaneta concurs with Rudo that there are more benefits than challenges in *small house* relationships. However, she differs from Rudo in the sense that she believes men should provide all resources. During the interview she had this to say:

Yes I know there are some challenges in small house relationships but it's much better to be in such a relationship than to remain single. For instance, I now have someone to pay the rentals as well as water and electricity bills. He also assists me in looking after my child and most importantly, he procures food for my family. Moreover, I have children and I am addressed as mother of Netty. I think you know in our society husbands are not enough for every woman. It's good that we share. Challenges are common in every marital relationship.

There seems to be a mixed bag of sentiments on the benefits and challenges experienced in *small house* relationships and this is what makes the *small house* phenomenon complex. However, the above female participants perceive more benefits in *small house* relationship than men do. As has been pointed out in the preceding section, the juxtaposition of benefits and challenges in *small house* relationships reveals mixed feelings on the relationship. It also reveals a dialectical discourse that illuminates perceptions of benefits and challenges in *small house* relationships. It thus becomes critical to compare the social exchanges between partners in *small house* relationships that culminate in sustainable relationships.

Although men tend to initiate *small house* relationships, they often regret such a relationship. For men the major benefits include sexual satisfaction, as only a few indicated that they benefited by having male children in *small house* relationship. The majority of men in *small house* relationships in this study admitted that supporting two families is a daunting task. Some male participants argued that polygyny is a better marital practice than the *small house* relationship because it is an open system which allows for the equitable distribution of

resources. From a social exchange perspective, it can be argued that despite all these challenges cited by men, they also perceive some benefits and that is why they continue with the relationship (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005:87; Nakonezny & Denton 2008:402; Blau 1964:137). A relationship that is beneficial is likely to last longer.

A critical analysis of social exchange theory reveals that it focuses more on short-term relationships with perceivable immediate transactions between interested parties. However, in long-term relationships (like the *small house* union), it is not easy to determine all the challenges and benefits realised. For instance, certain benefits such as comfort, companionship, tokens of appreciation as well as sharing moments of sadness or even happiness are not easily identified. Social exchange theory can thus be expanded to capture the unforeseeable transactions that come with long-term relationships. Against this backdrop, it can be observed that unanticipated benefits that are realised through long relationships tend to fortify such relationships thereby further discouraging parties from terminating the relationship. The social exchange theory also tends to gloss over issues of context, gender, age and class which may influence concessions in bargaining for social exchanges in relationships. By implication, women in sexual relationships tend to bargain with men in a given cultural context (Kandiyoti, 1988). Thus different African feminists emphasise fighting patriarchal ideologies in given historical and cultural contexts because the nuances and subtleties of the subordination of women are understood in specific circumstances and contexts. Thus although certain men perceive challenges in *small house* relationships, the social construction of masculinity and femininity in the Shona culture as well as stereotypical perceptions of male sexual virility compel them to persevere in such relationships taking responsibility towards children born from these *small house* relationships.

From a social exchange perspective, rewarding interactions are the ones in which rewards are distributed judiciously, hence distributive justice entails individuals' subjective impressions of the amount of rewards that ought to result from a given relationship (Homans, 1961:14; Sabatelli, 1982:3). It is true that women experience conflict, financial constraints and at times a lack freedom as well as other social problems in *small house* relationships, but all these seem not to outweigh the aforementioned benefits. For women, we see some agency because when marriage fails, they seek an alternative which brings almost the same benefits from a marital relationship. According to Thibaut and Kelly (in Sabatelli, 1982) by comparing the outcomes derived from a relationship to a person's comparative level or comparative level alternative, we obtain some insight into the degree of satisfaction and dependence experienced in the

relationship and thus some insight into the stability of the relationship. Thus, when pleasure, satisfaction and gratification are juxtaposed with the sacrifices, pain and challenges experienced in *small house* relationships, a certain equilibrium is perceived by the parties involved which sustains the relationship. This partially explains the proliferation of the *small house* phenomenon in contemporary Shona society.

The intricacies of gender dynamics of the *small house* relationship thus remain subtle, implicit and complex because the patterns of transactions of valuable resources are not so obvious. For instance, it has been seen that most women in *small house* relationships use sex as a resource in exchange for material support (Wang, 2004:2; Chitauro-Mawema, 2003:138) and yet sex may not be perceived as a sacrifice in an exchange relationship. It is actually a pleasure sought by both men and women in a marital (or related) relationship. As discussed in previous Chapters, sexuality in Africa is really a contentious issue as some cultures go out of their way to ensure its pleasure. For the Shona people the issue of sexuality is both sensitive and critical as it can define the success or failure of a marital relationship (Masasire, 1996:44; Bourdillon, 1998:49; Chavhunduka, 1979:21). Thus the proliferation of the *small house* phenomenon in contemporary Shona society could be a result of the fact that individuals who engage in such relationships are motivated by the goodness of the outcomes they experience (Blau 1964:137). However, owing to the complexity of the gender dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon, the benefits and challenges in the relationship cannot be universally generalised because they are relative and context bound.

6.7 CONCLUSION

It has been noted that the *small house* relationship tends to be beset by a myriad of social problems. The pervasiveness of social problems in *small house* relationships has been seen to be a result of the incompatibility between multiple concurrent sexual relationships and contemporary socio-political, socio-cultural and socioeconomic dispensations. The dialectical discourse on tradition and modernity creates a dichotomy between polygynous and monogamous marriages. To align themselves with modernity, men display double standards by pretending to be monogamously married yet clandestinely being in a *small house* relationship. Unlike its precursor (polygyny), the *small house* phenomenon is largely an urban phenomenon hence financial constraints expose this emerging family structure in Shona society to numerous challenges. The interviews conducted with the men and women in *small house* relationships revealed that men tend to justify their philandering behaviour by hiding behind

the façade of ‘our culture’ or ‘our tradition’. Such perceptions contribute to the social problems experienced in *small house* relationships. Another challenge is that the *small house* relationship is just one of multiple concurrent sexual relationships which expose partners to the risk of sexually transmitted infections including HIV and AIDS.

It has also been observed that gender-based violence is prevalent in some *small house* relationships and that women are usually the victims. Gender-based violence includes physical, emotional and even sexual abuse, which are exacerbated by stereotypical perceptions on masculinity and femininity among men and women in Shona culture. The juxtaposition of challenges and benefits in *small house* relationships reveals that there are more challenges than benefits. However, from a social exchange perspective, the *small house* relationship can only endure when the parties involved perceive the benefits of the relationship. Women’s agency is reflected in their bargaining with men whose patriarchal tendencies are deeply entrenched in their culture. It can thus be concluded that although the *small house* relationship tends to be beset by a myriad of social problems, its proliferation may be explained by perceived mutual and reciprocal benefits by the parties involved.

CHAPTER 7

ABSENT FATHERHOOD, SOCIALISATION AND SCHOOLING

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The relationship between family background and schooling is generally regarded as important (Kamau, 2013). Below, in the different interviews with the men and women in *small house* relationships it will be shown that the *small house* household is often a problematic context for child socialisation. This Chapter explores two critical phenomena – absent fatherhood and single parenthood in the context of *small house* relationships – as they relate to child socialisation and the provision of schooling resources for children growing up in such contexts. Since no children were interviewed (as explained in Chapter 4), this Chapter relies on the parents' reporting on their children. This limitation implies a one-sided picture on children growing up in *small house* households, and should thus be evaluated only as parents' reported interpretations (see also limitations in Chapter 8).

This Chapter also interrogates how lack of financial capital (poverty) in *small house* families becomes detrimental to the welfare of children growing up in such households. In doing so, it addresses the sub-research question: **What are the implications of absent fatherhood in *small house* households for the child's socialisation and schooling?** Chapter 2 explored the different types of fatherhood and obligations associated with such statuses. Absent fatherhood in *small house* households in effect means single parenthood, in these cases female-headed households, and this has a tremendous bearing on the welfare, behaviour and schooling of children growing up in such contexts because such households are characterised by poverty. Fathers in *small house* households tend to give preferential treatment to the children they had with the wife as it relates to distribution of resources or money. By implication, a *small house* household structurally resembles a single parent family because the father tends to be disengaged with this family and may only visit sporadically. Interviews with both men and women in *small house* relationships revealed that women are on their own with the children most of the time while men pay only occasional visits.

7.2 ABSENT FATHERHOOD AND SINGLE PARENTHOOD IN *SMALL HOUSE* RELATIONSHIPS

The concept of fatherhood is an integral component of the Shona kinship system. As pointed out in Chapter 2, the Shona people are patriarchal and patrilineal (Chirozva et al 2006:19) and as such the importance of the position of the father or father figure is important. The Shona's stereotypical perceptions of masculinity place critical responsibilities on 'the man of the house' which include social protection, provision of material resources as well as emotional support. The interviews with the men and women in *small house* relationships revealed that the duration of absence by fathers in *small house* relationships is usually so long that such households can be described as single parent families. Thus absent fatherhood and the subsequent lone parenthood phenomena have been observed to have detrimental consequences for the welfare of women and children in *small house* relationships because members of such households have less income which leads to the mothers experiencing additional strain. Hence the children in these households are likely to have worse levels of physical and mental health contributing to poor outcomes for children (Musick & Meier, 2010). An interview with Kaycee reveals:

I was a single mother when I got into this relationship. So, when I met this man, he promised me a lot of things. He promised to open a business for me. The biggest challenge now is that he no longer supports his children. He comes to my place for a little while and he gives preference to his original family. On average he comes once or twice a week and he stays for 20 to 30 mins. Since I now rely on vending for survival, I also have no time to monitor the behaviour of our children.

Kaycee's situation is typical that of a single mother as shown by the sporadic visits of the partner. She further elaborates on her situation:

As I have already said, it's quite some challenge looking after the children as a single mother. Although I haven't discovered it personally, neighbours complain about the conduct of my children. I struggle selling vegetables at the market to make sure that I pay my rentals and buy food for my children. At times I fail to raise school fees which may result in children missing lessons. At times the father doesn't come at all. It's difficult to raise fees and in most cases it entirely remains my burden. Generally,

feeding and clothing these children as well as monitoring their behaviour are proving to be a daunting task for me.

Kaycee revealed that as a single parent she was struggling to make ends meet. Her desperation and discontent were shared by Adiona, another *small house* woman, during the interviews:

I live in Eastview and my 'husband' lives in Mbare. He has challenges leaving his family and coming to see me. He comes once or twice a month. It seems he is under strict surveillance from his wife. So I struggle on my own to provide for our children.

Like Kaycee, Adiona's situation is typical of a single parent and when asked about the challenges she faced in her relationship she had this to say:

If you look at the life that I am leading, I can describe myself as a single woman. Just imagine, he comes once a month and at times he never comes at all. I am always alone at home. Just imagine if I fell sick at night or even woke up dead one day. Such thoughts affect me emotionally. I need a reliable 'husband' to lean on when things are difficult. Life has been like this since I started this relationship. After giving birth to my first born, I stayed with my child and saw her through primary school on my own. Fending for children with very little or no support from the father has always been a challenge for me.

Single parenthood in the context of the *small house* household tends to be detrimental to the wellbeing of the mother and her children. A study by Manning and Lamb (2003) reveals that single parent women struggle to support their children. As indicated earlier in Chapter 6, only two of all the women in the *small house* relationships who were interviewed are formally employed. The rest are either informally employed and earn very little or are fulltime housewives. With regard to the socioeconomic background of these women in *small house* relationships, it can be concluded that most of them live in dire poverty. Ironically, the *small house* relationship is perceived as an escape from poverty by some women, and yet the absent fatherhood phenomenon exposes the same *small house* household to poverty as the father struggles to provide for two households. In support, Ochonogor (2014:23) and Park (2007:863-4) argue that families headed by women are more likely to be poor because of the lower earning capacity of single mothers and the lack of support provided by the non-resident fathers.

Most of the women and some of the men in *small house* relationships complained of behavioural problems in their children. A follow-up interview with Beauty reveals:

Our child is a problem and I know the problem is that there is no father figure in the home. There are numerous reports of fights; there are also reports that he even insults elders in the community. I get all this from our neighbours and it stresses me a lot. There is one nasty incident that I didn't want to tell you; at one point he attempted to rape an Early Childhood Development girl (5 years old) who was coming from school and he was beaten thoroughly by the police. I wish I could stay home and monitor the behaviour of my child. Like I said, there is no father figure in the house to reprimand him and at the same time I am always away trying to make ends meet.

As Beauty narrated her experiences in the *small house* relationship, she began to cry and this illustrates the extent to which she is emotionally affected by both her child's behaviour and her situation. Another interview with Wilbert, a long distance truck driver in a *small house* relationship is revealing:

Yes problems are there, especially considering that these are children growing up without their father to guide them. I have heard and observed that their behaviour is wayward. I try to talk to them but I think the time I spend with them is too little. The mother is away most of the time too, she is a cross-border trader, meaning to say most of the time the children will be on their own.

Continued absent fatherhood tends to culminate in a detached bond between the father and his children in the *small house* household. However, by being a cross-border trader Wilbert's woman rejects the ideals of the feminine mystique; that women are passive recipients of goods provided by men. Chipo also shared her experiences during the interview:

He comes to see his children once a month. At times he comes when the children are at school which means he doesn't see them at all. Most of the time he comes empty handed. The children are not used to him; he is almost a stranger to them. I don't think there is any bond between him and the children. Remember these children are grown

up now; they wonder why he does not pay fees for them. The father seems not worried about the welfare of children. He rarely brings food for children.

It can be argued that although good fathering may not be universally defined, it commonly includes dedicated breadwinning (Richter et al, 2012; Mavungu, 2013). A father–child relationship tends to thrive when the father is attentive and responsive to the child’s needs. Another interview with Manuel supported the sentiments expressed by Chipso:

I can describe my relationship with my son as weak. He has a lot of questions particularly about my absence. I love my son. I tried to explain the nature of my relationship with his mother, but I still see he doesn’t trust me. I have observed that each time I get to their place he disappears. If I ask him some questions, he just gives one word answers, indicating that he does not want to talk to me at all.

It is apparent that the weak bond between the father and his children is a result of the erratic visits by the father to the *small house* household. Unlike children in single parent households, children who grow up with two married parents tend to be emotionally stable, well-behaved and do well in school (Amato, 2005). However, an interview with Tawanda contradicted the preceding perceptions of the bond between fathers in *small house* relationships and their children. When asked about the nature of the relationship between him and his daughter, this is what he said:

The bond between me and my daughter is very strong. Although I don’t live with her, she loves me very much and I love her very much too. In any case, she is the reason I got into this relationship. I wanted a girl child. In terms of her conduct, I have never heard anything bad about her behaviour.

Although Tawanda reported a positive relationship with his daughter from a *small house* relationship, it was a rare case. It could be that he spends time with his *small house* household, but generally there appeared to be weak relationships between the father and his children in the *small house* household, which were probably as a result of his continuing absence in such households.

An interview with Gararirimo, a businessman in Harare, who is also in a *small house* relationship, illustrates that the *small house* household is a difficult context for child socialisation. When asked about the behaviour of his son with the *small house* woman, Gararirimo explained:

I think he is developing behavioural problems. Quite a number of days the mother calls saying the child hasn't arrived home from school. So many times people have gone out looking for him. I am told he fights with other boys and no longer listens to the mother. In fact she says he sometimes picks a strong argument with her. From the look of things she is losing control over him. I am not always there to reprimand and counsel the little boy.

It is here observed that single mothers in *small house* relationships tend to have little time to monitor their children. In fact poor parental involvement and monitoring tend to be one of the predictors of children's involvement in problem behaviours (Patrick, 2006). In contrast, Amato (2005) observes that children growing up with two married parents tend to do well in school. Absent fatherhood relegates economic responsibilities to the mother who in turn is left with no time to monitor the behaviour of their children. Gararirimo further revealed in the same interview:

I can describe the bond with my child as weak. There are a number of factors to explain this, but most importantly, I don't stay with this family, only pay occasional visits; twice or three times a month. I think my son has problems in accepting me as the father because I have observed he is not free to say things he wants from me. If there is something he wants from me, he tells the mother.

Such lack of freedom and confidence in the father could be indicative of the mistrust that the child has developed as a consequence of the father's long absence from home and may affect the child's personality in terms of confidence and assertiveness. However, the social dynamics surrounding behavioural problems in children growing up in *small house* relationships remain complex, subtle and relative to specific circumstances. They may not be easily generalised or explained in simplistic terms. For instance, during an interview with Gararirimo, the complexity of behavioural problems in children growing up in *small house* families was further explored:

Children's behaviour problems can be explained in the context of our culture. Usually behaviour problems for children growing outside the mhuri (family) may be seen as indications that the child needs to join those of his tribe. It's caused by ancestral spirit mediums. Our child uses his mother's surname, so the behaviour problems that I have explained could be a manifestation that the anomaly be corrected and the child uses the rightful surname. Because he is male, his birth certificate must be registered in our family name. Another explanation could be merely the lack of a father figure in the household. The voice of a father is needed to reprimand children's unruly behaviour.

Gararirimo exposes the complexities surrounding children's behavioural problems which result from absent fatherhood when he links his child's behavioural problems to metaphysical explanations. To this end, Mazembo et al (2013:33) postulate that fatherhood assumes metaphysical meaning particularly in African cultures, for which the presence of a father is regarded as key to the child's identity and prosperity and a connecting force to sources of success, good fortune and access to ancestors. It can be argued that when Gararirimo says that because the child is a boy his birth certificate should be registered in his family name, he suggests that if the child were a girl there would be no need to bother about the status of her birth certificate. Such thinking tends to be informed by a patriarchal orientation inculcated by Shona cultural imperatives which place more value on the boy child (Chirozva et al, 2006). The absence of a father or father figure in the home is thus a cause for concern as far as the socialisation of children is concerned and here fathers as disciplinarians are also mentioned. An interview with John further reveals:

I have heard that teachers complain that there are problems with the behaviour of our child. He seems not comfortable in the company of male teachers. I am told teachers say the child shows signs of withdrawal. I have also observed that the child does not trust me. Maybe it's because at times I fight with the mother, especially when I suspect that she is seeing someone else.

According to Manning and Lamb (2003) as well as Musick and Meier (2010) parental conflict is associated with behaviour problems for young children as they may become either withdrawn or become violent themselves. It is observed here that John's son has been exposed to a violent environment at a very young age. The violent father may be transferable to other adult men

hence he is not comfortable in the presence of a male teacher. Moreover, prolonged absent fatherhood has created mistrust and a weak bond between him and his child. In Chapter 5 the way the *small house* household tends to be plagued by gender-based violence was discussed. Such violence may affect the emotional stability of children growing up in such contexts leading to violent and physically aggressive tendencies and at times such children show signs of withdrawal. In support, McLanahan (in Kamau, 2013) observes that children from homes where the father is absent tend to manifest behavioural problems including fighting and physical aggression. When such children go to school they are likely to engage in bullying behaviour. Consequently, such emotional instability may affect the child's concentration in class. Thus the *small house* household may not be an environment that is always conducive for child socialisation.

Whatever the case, the bottom line is that in the Shona culture the presence of a father or father figure in the home is critical for inculcating discipline (Gelfand, 1973). From the responses given in the different interviews above it has been noted that absent fatherhood in *small house* relationships culminates in single parenthood and subsequent behaviour problems for children growing up in such households. Comparatively, Manning and Lamb (2003) revealed that families with both parents tend to offer better environments for children's development and life chances than other family structures.

As discussed in Chapter 2, in Shona culture, stereotypical perceptions of masculinity and fatherhood regarded the man as a primarily provider of material goods and financial resources and in seeking to provide for their families, men were forced to look to the diaspora. However, Chereni (2015) argues that while cross-border migration provides opportunities for migrant men to fulfil the traditional breadwinner role in the family, it may simultaneously limit their participation in those nurturing roles which require regular contact. Such perceptions of masculinity and the breadwinner role seem to endure and permeate *small house* relationships in contemporary Shona society. The absent fathers are still expected to play both their economic and social fatherhood roles.

Both social and economic fatherhood have been seen to be critically important roles for fathers in *small house* households. The absence of a father or father figure in *small house* households was perceived as a cause of behaviour problems in children growing up in such contexts. The findings of this study indicate that fathers in *small house* relationships are expected to comply

with social and economic obligations; however owing to the secretive nature of the *small house* relationship and the economic crisis currently prevailing in the country, fathers in *small house* families tend to abdicate their social and economic responsibilities. As already indicated in the preceding paragraph, from a traditional African perspective economic fatherhood entails the cultural scenario of the breadwinner and emphasises financial support for material needs and welfare of the children (Lamb & Lewis, 2007:5; Rabe, 2007:12). A good father in the Shona culture is one who is able to provide materially for his family. The sentiments expressed by the women in *small house* relationships above showed that it is one of the reasons they entered into such relationships, that is, to receive material support from their partners. However, owing to massive unemployment and the economic crisis prevailing in Zimbabwe, most women in *small house* relationships have been frustrated as men tend to buckle under the pressure of supporting two families. Consequently, fathers of children in *small house* families often abdicate their social and economic responsibilities towards these children. For this reason some men in *small house* relationships tend to see themselves as emasculated and unable to fully assume a fatherhood role.

In African culture, a good father is not only one who can provide materially and financially, but also one who can provide social and emotional support (Chirozva et al 2006). This brings us to the notion of social fatherhood; an important role for the father figure which enhances social interaction with the father in the Shona family or *mhuri*. Social fatherhood therefore thrives on the constant provision of care and emotional attention to both the partner and children. It can therefore be argued that sporadic visits by fathers in *small house* relationships disqualify them from the social fatherhood role, a role which emphasises teaching, nurturing, providing guidance, playing and spending quality time with children. As a consequence of absent fatherhood, it has been noted that there exists a detached bond between the father and children in *small house* families. Looking at the behavioural problems cited in the excerpts from the different interviews regarding the *small house* phenomenon, it can be strongly argued that the absence of social fatherhood has grave ramifications for the wellbeing and behaviour of children growing in these households.

A father or a father figure in the Shona culture is expected to be highly visible and to provide the household with protection from enemies and other social evils (Chereni, 2015; Chirozva, 2006:10; Bourdillon, 1993; Townsend, 2013:196). However, the sentiments expressed during the interviews with both the men and women in *small house* relationships show that the

secretive nature of the relationship makes it difficult for the father to fully play his role in social fatherhood. For men in *small house* relationships, there is a struggle to conceal the relationship hence the sporadic visits to their *small house* families. In this regard, Pitsoane (2014:5) argues that the amount of contact time between children and their father influences the children's personalities. Absent fatherhood in *small house* relationships tends to be so pervasive that it is not surprising that children, particularly boys, in such relationships remain uncultured because they lack a role model. In the Shona culture it is the responsibility of the father or a father figure to inculcate appropriate and accepted behaviour. By extension, the absence of social fatherhood in *small house* relationships tends to compromise affectionate and emotional bonds between the father and his children. It can thus be argued that children growing up in *small house* households may lack role models for adulthood. Patrick (2003:31) adds that if the father spends much time away from home and leaves child rearing to the mother, he may easily become emotionally detached from his children.

Although single parenthood in the Western context is increasing and hence more accepted, in the Shona culture it is still treated with scorn and derision. It has been noted that the *small house* household as a typical single parent family fails to socialise children into socially accepted behaviours because the single parent tends to be overwhelmed by domestic and economic activities. Despite such challenges, Shona women still enter in *small house* relationships because they are perceived as a better option than remaining single. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6; for the Shona people marriage, and subsequently motherhood, remains as one of the indicators of a successful life for a woman. However, the *small house* relationship remains a contested terrain as the juxtaposition of polygyny with the *small house* phenomenon exposes incompatible perceptions of the latter between men and women in contemporary Shona society.

Ideally, it is the responsibility of both parents to socialise children into socially accepted behaviour (Musick & Meier, 2010). In this regard, the *small house* household becomes problematic because both parents may lack adequate commitment and involvement in the welfare of their children. However, such lack of involvement may not be deliberate but as a result of the circumstances surrounding the *small house* relationship. As mentioned earlier, the complexities inherent in the gender dynamics of *small house* relationships are not easy to discern and may not be explained in universal terms and simplistic generalisations; they remain relative as they depend on prevailing circumstances.

7.3 FAMILY BACKGROUND AND SCHOOLING

A number of research studies have indicated that social and family background has a great influence on school performance (Kamau, 2013). The family has two critical roles when it comes to children's schooling – socialisation and the provision of financial and material resources for schooling. The study thus also explored the *small house* household as a context for the child's socialisation and as a source for the provision of resources for children's schooling. Consequently, the notions of absent fatherhood and lone parenthood in *small house* families are explored focusing on their impact on the schooling of children growing up in such contexts. According to Kim (2002:33), the family background can be separated into two main components: the financial capital (family income) and the social capital (social relationships) which are critical for children's schooling. As discussed in Chapter 6, financial capital tends to be elusive in most *small house* households leading to pervasive poverty, which is typical in such female-headed households. From the different interviews with men and women in *small house* relationships, it emerged that lack of financial capital is pervasive and that it has grave ramifications for the schooling of children growing in *small house* families. Due to the secrecy of the *small house* relationship, children also have less social capital networks that they can draw on. For example, they usually have no contact with their father's family and hence a lot of potential support is foregone.

7.3.1 The *Small house* and Children' Schooling Experiences

Children growing up in the context of *small house* family background tend to experience challenges with regards to their schooling. Ochonogor (2014:19) observes that single parent family background is a problematic context for preparing children for schooling. As is the case with most women in *small house* relationships, an interview with Chipso revealed that she struggles to provide educational resources for her twin daughters. Responding to a question in this regard she said:

The major challenge I have has to do with raising school fees. My twin daughters miss school quite often when they are sent back home by school authorities to collect fees. They usually stay at home for a couple of days before I raise part of their fees. The other challenge has to do with failure to provide proper school uniforms and other resources which include stationery. I also think that the conditions of study at home

are not conducive because in White-Cliff (where she lives) we don't have electricity and at times I have no money to buy fuel for the lamps.

Earlier in the interview, Chipo had indicated that her partner visits them once a month, effectively making her the head of the household. As discussed in Chapter 6, the *small house* household tends to be greatly affected by poverty, like any other single-parent family (Ochonogor, 2014:23; Park, 2007:863-4). It is such poverty that tends to affect the schooling of children growing up in *small house* households. Chipo's sentiments were echoed by many of the participants during the interviews. Adiona had this to say during interviews:

I am struggling to raise school fees for my daughter who is in form 4. Since first term this year I have paid \$100 out of \$300. This term (second term) I haven't paid a single cent. Her teachers are quite sympathetic; they have encouraged me to raise examination fees and at times they offer me some work to do at school. The father rarely visits us now and no longer assists in paying school fees for our daughter. Had it not been that school regulations do not allow authorities to send children away from school, she could be out of school by now.

An interview with Tawanda also revealed:

Our daughter is now in Form 2. She is actually repeating because she seems to have very low aptitude and has been performing poorly in class. I have never had an opportunity to attend open days and assess her performance personally but the mother confirms that she has challenges with her education. Fees in rural schools are not very high and at her school we pay \$65 per term. However, I must admit that both of us at times fail to raise the fees and she is sent away from school by the school authorities. I think by failing to pay her fees on time we contribute to her poor performance in class.

It is also important to note that besides financial constraints, both parents have limited time with children, such parents can often not assist in schoolwork matters. The fathers tend to have more years of formal schooling but their children are not practically assisted in their schoolwork. The children in the *small house* households therefore also lose out on practical support. As mentioned in the preceding Chapter, resources in *small house* households tend to be overstretched because the man is expected to provide for two households. Consequently,

partners in *small house* families struggle to pay for school fees and other schooling requirements like stationery for their children. Because of the *small house* relationship, children at the 'main' house may as well experience challenges with fees. In this regard, the H-Metro carried a story of a woman from Borrowdale Brooke (one of the most affluent suburbs in Harare) who appeared in black at a baby shower where everyone was dressed in white clothes organised by her husband's *small house* accusing her of squandering money meant for her children's fees. Charity told H-Metro that:

Sandra had become a thorn in my children's flesh and is up to destroying their lives by disturbing their education, (showing letters from their children's schools indicating amounts of money they are supposed to pay by the end of November). I had to negotiate with all three schools' authorities where my children are after failing to pay school fees whilst Shepherd and Sandra are busy selling our assets for a lavish life. As we speak the schools have engaged debt collectors that may want to come and attach property since the address used is where I am living with children (H-Metro, Sunday 8 November 2015).

The reporting of these matters in the media confirms the pervasiveness of the problem and here highlights how the *small house* phenomenon may affect the schooling of children from both the 'main' house and the *small house*. Like other participants, Gararirimo shared his experience in *small house* relationship:

Our son is in Grade 5 and goes to a private school where I pay \$165 as fees per term. At times when things are real tight we fail to pay the school fees completely. Failure to pay school fees has resulted in him being sent home by school authorities to collect fees. Quite a number of times the mother phones to say the child has been sent away from school. I am contemplating transferring him to high density suburbs school where school fees are relatively low.

It is important to note that in high density schools, fees and levies are relatively low implying that comparatively standards are also relatively low. In other words because of poverty in *small house* households, parents are likely to send their children to schools with lower school fees but also perhaps offering a lower quality of education due to bigger classes, less resources and demotivated teachers.

As was the case with the other participants in *small house* relationships, lack of financial capital tends to compromise the education of children living in *small house* relationships. The economic crisis currently prevailing in the country seems to have led to deterioration in the participants' financial status, especially those who are responsible for more than one household. Jack explained as follows during the interview:

At times our daughter misses school selling freezits with her mother in the streets. As you can see I am struggling to make ends meet. I am struggling to support my original family. At times when I get some money, I buy books for her but to tell you the truth; I am failing to provide for her education adequately. To make matters worse, the mother has a child with another man.

Because of the poverty that prevails in *small house* families, children tend to be engaged in child labour to supplement family income. Consequently their education tends to be affected as they may not have time to study or do homework because they are on the streets vending. Engaging children in child labour is a violation of Article 15 of the Convention on the Rights of Children, which emphasises that children should be protected from all forms of economic exploitation or any work that interferes with their physical and social development. In this regard, parents and school officials should be held accountable for denying children the right to schooling.

The Shona culture emphasises material support as a central aspect of adequate fathering (Tatira, 2010; Chirozva et al, 2006:10; Chereni, 2015). Adequate fathering also includes payment of school fees for children. However, the struggle to raise school fees by parents in *small house* households leads to sporadic school attendance by children growing up in such contexts. As a result, children tend to miss certain concepts taught in school which may result in academic underachievement. Owing to the economic crisis in Zimbabwe, men in multiple concurrent relationships find it very difficult to support their *small house* families; hence they tend to abdicate their school fees responsibility. Consequently, as a single parent, the woman in the *small house* relationship finds it difficult to access the resources for children's schooling.

Although a father's physical presence alone is not necessarily a positive outcome in itself, absent fatherhood has detrimental consequences for the family if the absent father does not support them financially, practically and emotionally (Mazembo et al, 2013). Similarly, according to Kim (2002:12), the proponents of the economic deprivation perspective argue that the potential effects of the single parenthood phenomenon are not a result of the absence of one

parent, but rather the absence of the economic resources generated by the absent parent. It can therefore be argued that disengaged fatherhood in *small house* households makes the *small house* a problematic context for raising children and providing resources for their schooling.

It should be noted that for Zimbabwe, the state does not allow children to be turned away from school when parents fail to pay fees, but school authorities do so anyway. The state may thus be blamed for failing to hold the school authorities accountable for denying children their right to education. Failure to pay schools fees may also affect children's self-esteem, self-confidence and motivation to work hard in school. This confirms the observation that family background has a strong bearing on children's education (Kamau, 2013; Kim, 2002:33).

7.3.2 Absent Fatherhood and Children's School related Problems

Children need support from their parents if they are to do well in school. Parents are there to encourage children and assist them with study and homework (Ochonogor, 2014). If they are not monitored they may resort to truancy and other 'anti-school activities'. Sporadic visits to the *small house* by the father become an issue because a weak bond tends to be established between the father and their children which in turn affect their socialisation. An interview with Tom also reveals:

Another problem is that I am told that the boy has become a nuisance at school. He takes advantage of the absence of both of us to play truancy at school. The mother was called at school by the school head, where she was told that our child's school attendance is erratic and that he had joined an anti-school gang with boys from the adjacent secondary school. The head suspects the gang was into bullying and drug abuse. His teacher had noticed erratic school attendance from the register and alerted the school head. Unfortunately, because of the nature of our relationship I cannot go to the school and talk to the teachers. The mother says his performance in school has deteriorated tremendously. I think the little boy needs to be sent to reformatory for rehabilitation.

When Tom was asked why his son behaves the way he does he answered:

I think my absence from the small house household could be the reason why my son behaves wildly. I have no time to sit down and guide him on issues pertaining to life. Just imagine a grade 5 pupil playing with boys in secondary school.

It is apparent here that disengaged fatherhood has serious ramifications for the behaviour of children growing in the *small house* families. To this end, Manning and Lamb (2003) observe that children from two parent families show less anxiety about their academic activities because they are emotionally more stable with less emotional problems. When asked to describe the nature of his relationship with his son, Tom said:

I don't want to pretend that things are fine; no, there is no bond between me and my son. For the few days I pay them a visit I rarely see him at home. I am really a stranger to him. I told you earlier that I suspect that the mother must be seeing other men. If that is true, then the little boy treats me just like one of his mother's acquaintances. Of course I fail to provide for him, not because I don't want, but things are difficult for everyone. Maybe he hates me because one day I gave him a thorough beating after having been told by the mother that he had stolen some apples and money from a woman selling fruit by their gate. So each time I am home he avoids me. Like I said the little boy needs to be sent to reformatory for rehabilitation.

The behaviour of Tom's son reflects a sign of maladjustment which may affect the son's schooling experiences. Jack echoed the same sentiments in describing his relationship with his child during an interview:

I can say my relationship with my child is not solid. Of course she acknowledges me as her father, but she is not free with me. When I ask her about something she is coy with information. She doesn't want to talk to me for a long time. I see that she has reservations with me. She has never asked for anything from me like what other children do. Usually it's me who asks her whether I can buy her something. Usually the answer is one word, yes. I don't blame her, I understand her. I am almost a stranger to her. Most of the time when I go to their place I don't see her. In terms of social interaction with my daughter, I can describe it as very limited. The other issue is that she now knows that there is something wrong with my relationship with her mother. I happened to have an opportunity to read her school report and the comment "a quiet and reserved girl" runs through terms.

When the child becomes too reserved, she may also show signs of withdrawal which can be detrimental to her participation in school. The weak relationship between Jack and his daughter

could be attributed to his prolonged absence and lack of social interaction. From the daughter's perspective Jack is an outsider who should not be trusted.

As mentioned earlier, the relationship between family background and schooling for children is important. According to De Lange, Dronkers and Wolbers (2014:329) and Teachman (1987:548), the family provides the child with opportunities to develop into a stable and independent person by enabling the child to attend school; moreover, children's future success depends on the household they grow up in. The interviews with different men and women in *small house* relationships reveal that absent fatherhood also relates to not being an engaged father which has a tremendous bearing on the education of children growing up in *small house* families.

The cultural image of the father figure in a family in Southern Africa in general and the Shona people in particular, is that of a highly visible and esteemed member of society and the acknowledged head and focal authority of the family (Mavungu, 2013:67). In *small house* households, absent fatherhood and the fact that the mother tends to be overwhelmed by domestic and economic responsibilities, leading to a lack of guidance, have been seen as reasons why children growing up in such contexts display irresponsible, out-of-control behaviour. Townsend (2013:196) further elaborates that social fatherhood entails being close, trusted, and affectionate and emotionally supportive and providing children with appropriate role models for adulthood. Thus disengaged fatherhood in *small house* households becomes a cause for concern in terms of child socialisation. Richter et al (2012) concurs and adds that a father who acknowledges and supports his children confers social values on them. Ochonogor (2014) further espouses that children raised from single parent homes are faced with abnormal behaviours due to the fact that they lack care, control and close relationship that are found in families where both parents are available. It can thus be argued that the behavioural problems displayed by some children at school could be a result of the failure by families to inculcate socially approved behaviour as a consequence of absent fatherhood and single parenthood.

Marsiglio and Roy (2012:193) argue that a father-child relationship tends to thrive when the father is attentive and responsive to the child's needs in ways appropriate to the child's development stage. A father is defined as an involved father if his relationship with his children can be described as being sensitive, warm, close, friendly, supportive, intimate, nurturing, affectionate, encouraging, comforting and accepting (Allen & Daly, 2007:22). In this regard,

the father–child relationship in the *small house* household tends to be affected by the father’s sporadic visits which compromise the development of an emotional bond between the father and his children. In such circumstances it becomes very difficult for the father to be responsive to the children’s educational needs if he is always away and emotionally detached. Consequently, he develops merely a weak bond with his children which can affect children’s emotional stability, which may in turn affect their concentration in school. In the same vein, Chereni (2015) observes that the image of fatherless and non-resident fathers feeds into a popular narrative of abandonment and inadequacy, as well as pessimistic views of fathering, which emphasises men’s failure to meet the material and emotional needs of children. In other words, self-perceptions of inadequate fathering may further emasculate the fathers in *small house* households and consequently children growing up in such contexts may become emotionally unstable and withdrawn as they feel rejected. Parental rejection may lead to withdrawal or rebellious behaviour which can be detrimental to children’s schooling. In fact, children’s feelings of rejection by significant others, particularly parents, may have grave ramifications for their concentration and hence performance in class.

Father involvement in child rearing is critical for the development of the personality traits appropriate for schooling. In this regard, Peacock et al (2008:33) argue that the engagement or presence of a father or a father figure in the life of a child positively affects the child’s life prospects, academic achievement, physical and emotional health, and linguistic and cognitive development. It is thus argued that absent fatherhood in *small house* families may affect the socialisation and schooling of children growing up in such contexts. McLanahan (in Kamau, 2013:13) posits that children from father-absent homes tend to manifest more behavioural problems including fighting and physical aggression. Such behaviours may affect children’s schooling. It can thus be argued that the sporadic visits by fathers in *small house* families affect the bond between the father and his children, leading to neglect of both financial capital and social support responsibilities. Consequently, schooling for children growing up in *small house* families tends to be greatly affected and under such circumstances the girl child comes off worse.

Parental involvement may also refer to parents’ involvement in school activities such as consultation days or even communicating with teachers to check on children’s progress at school. The secretive nature of the *small house* relationship denies fathers the opportunity to monitor their children’s schooling. Garriga (in De Lange et al, 2014:332) observes that because there is a lack of monitoring in single-parent families, children are more often late for school

or as seen here, even not attend at all. In addition, children growing up in *small house* families are more likely to experience behavioural problems because parents tend lack time to monitor their children. It can thus be concluded that less parental involvement in children's school activities has ripple effects on children's academic performance

7.3.3 Educational Preferences according to Gender

As a result of patriarchal orientation in the Shona society, payment of school fees by some parents in *small house* relationships gives preference to boys. In doing so, fathers in *small house* relationships tend to violate one of the fundamental rights for children; access to education. An interview with Tichaona shows that parents in *small house* relationships prefer to educate the boy child:

Our daughter who is in Form 3 goes to Marlborough High School. We pay \$120 per term as school fees. It is very difficult to raise this amount because all my children in the other family are still in school. In terms of paying school fees, I give preference to my original family because I have boy children only, then I will consider my daughter in the small house. After all she is a woman; if she does not make it in school, she will get married. At times she misses school when I fail to raise the school fees on time.

A follow-up interview with Kaycee also confirms this:

As you can see I am struggling raising school fees for the children and the father is not forthcoming. If it continues like this I will let Lucy drop out of school then I continue struggling with Sam.

When asked why she would let Lucy drop out of school Kaycee said:

I know Lucy is better than Sam at school but I would rather have her drop out of school just because she is a woman. At least she has marriage as another option for sustenance in life. Sam has no such option; he is the future breadwinner and needs education to get a good job. In any case, if Lucy drops out of school she can assist me with vending.

Such perceptions are a manifestation of the value placed on the girl child's labour in the home in the Shona culture (Dorsey in Nekatibeb, 2002:5). Negative perceptions of education for the girl child were also revealed by Manuel during the interviews:

I have had enough of this school fees raising struggle. Everyone understands that the economy is in a crisis and that there are no jobs. This daughter of ours has been in and out of school for a long time now. I have told the mother that since she is now able to read and write, we let her drop out of school because we are struggling to raise school fees for her. The mother seems to be adamant about this. We are simply wasting resources because her education will benefit her future in-laws and not us. Personally I have since given up because I have other children in my original family who are still in school.

Manuel's small house woman's behaviour reflects resilience, resistance and assertiveness when she insists that their daughter should not drop out of school. Like Manuel, in relation to challenges concerning the payment of school fees Beauty had this to say during interviews:

Our son was born in the year 2000 and he is now in form 2 at Lord Marlvin High School and we pay \$150 as school fees. Payment of school fees is really a challenge. We are now in the second term but I have paid half of the fees for the first term. The school authorities accept instalments, so I pay bit by bit through their bank. His sister did not finish school. She dropped out of school at form 3 because I had failed to raise her school fees. When she dropped out, I did not bother myself because she is a woman and as I speak right now, she is married, but this one must finish school because he is a man.

When asked why she thinks the boy must finish school she said: *"He is the man of the house and the breadwinner. I expect him to look after me in my old age".*

All the participants mentioned above tend to value the education of the boy child. Manuel is overwhelmed by his responsibility to provide resources for the education of all his children. His excuse for not paying school fees for his daughter is based on patriarchal hegemony which tends to devalue the importance of the girl child's labour in the economic sphere. According to Manuel, basic education (being literate) is sufficient for a girl child. More so, the daughter is from the *small house*. So when there are limited resources, the cited participants look at the gender of the child and if the child is from the original family, a son in the original family will thus be most likely to be given preference to attend school. However, Manuel's small house reflects women's agency by resisting patriarchal mentality which downplays the girl child's education.

It is therefore argued in this study that lack of financial capital in *small house* households tends to affect the education of children growing up in such contexts and that in such situations the girl child comes off worst. It is also observed here that absent fatherhood in *small house* households violates Article 18 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which emphasises that both parents should share responsibility for bringing up children; they should always consider what is best for each child. Similarly, lack of social interaction and social support which comes about as a result of absent fatherhood, particularly engaged fatherhood in *small house* households, also affects the education of children growing up in such households.

The gendered social exchanges in the context of *small house* relationships are a manifest of a patriarchal ideology which tends to celebrate masculinity; thereby influencing decisions on the girl child's dropping out of school. By dropping out of school, the girl child's life chances are further emaciated leaving her with marriage as the last option. Chenai, another *small house* participant, has a daughter who dropped out of school and got married at the age of 16. Similarly, Stembiso as well Beauty's daughters married at the ages of 15 and 17 respectively. Child marriage becomes an issue that affects the education of the girl child. However, it was outside the scope of this study to explore in detail the nexus between child marriage and school dropout, it is an area that needs further research. For now it suffices to point out that challenges in *small house* relationships may result in child marriages consequently affecting the education of the girl child.

Based on the data collected through the interviews conducted with men and women in *small house* relationships, it can be argued that the provision of schooling requirements in the context of *small house* families takes a gender dimension. A significant number of participants indicated that they were not particularly concerned by their failure to raise school fees for their daughters because they believe that a woman's success lies in marriage and subsequent motherhood even though they have failed to secure marriage themselves. The belief that the apex of a woman's success lies in marriage and motherhood is typical of African cultural imperatives (Makaudze, 2015:266; Mazuru & Nyambi, 2012; Masuku, 2005:51; Ahikire, 2014:9). It is important to note that such perceptions may not be compatible with the contemporary socio-economic dispensation where some women have been seen to be breadwinners. Nonetheless, such stereotypical perceptions of the education of the girl child tend to be informed by Shona cultural values relating to the economic value of the girl child, as well as the value given to her work in the home. On the same note, Dorsey (in Nekatibeb, 2002:5), in referring to Zimbabwe, states that girls' economic value takes precedence over their

education. In this regard, Dorsey further elaborates that in many African societies the continuing importance of bride price, polygyny and value accorded to marriage and subsequent motherhood depress the demand for female education. The *small house* household has been seen to be no exception in valuing the education of the boy child at the expense of the girl child's education. This was reflected in their segregatory tendencies in terms of school fees payment for the boy child and the girl child and their reluctance to keep the girl child in school. Odaga and Heneveld (1993) further elaborate that the dropout rate of girls from school is linked to socioeconomic factors within the family. Thus because of poverty in *small house* households, parents prefer to send the boy child to school since the Shona culture perceives the boy child as the future breadwinner. Such cultural ideals which create inequalities between the boy child and the girl child are the concern of African feminism which attempts to reconstruct cultural perceptions which are oppressive of the girl child (Kolawole, 1997; Gaidzanwa, 2010; Goredema, 2010). Gender dynamics in *small house* households are thus informed by stereotypical Shona cultural perceptions of femininity and masculinity which on the whole may affect the schooling of the girl child. Since the mother in the *small house* tends to be busy with economic activities, the girl child may wake up early in the morning to do household chores before she goes to school and by the time she gets to school, she is already tired and this may affect her concentration in class. The demands made on the girl child's labour in the home compromise her education and thus create unequal life opportunities between the boy child and the girl child. As a result of the patriarchal hegemony pervasive in Shona society, the provision of educational resources for children growing up in the context of *small house* households becomes gendered thus disadvantaging the girl child.

7.3.4 Birth Certificates and Retention in School

In Zimbabwe children who have no birth certificates may not be allowed to write public examinations. From the various interviews with men and women in *small house* relationships, it also emerged that securing birth certificates for children is a big challenge. It is important to note that the lack of a birth certificate can affect the child's retention in school. Kaycee explained during an interview:

Right now as I speak, our children do not have birth certificates, and this is posing a lot of problems because school authorities continue asking for them. If it continues like this, they are going to drop out of school because they cannot write examinations without birth certificates.

Birth certificates are a real issue in the *small house* household; Rudo's account echoed this predicament concerning birth certificates for the children:

In terms of paying school fees we seem not to have problems yet because our children are still in primary school and fees are very much affordable. The only challenge we had, had to do with birth certificates. Our first born had no birth certificate and was forced to repeat grade 6 because he could not write public examinations at grade 7 without a birth certificate. My partner was very evasive when it came to securing birth certificates for our children. Maybe he was afraid that our relationship could be discovered. We had to go to Chinhoyi (a town 115km from Harare) to secure birth certificates for our children.

Tom concurred with Rudo on the challenges concerning securing birth certificates for children in *small house* families. He had this to say:

In this small house relationship of mine I have a son who is ten years old and is doing grade 5 at one of the primary schools in Warren Park. The first challenge is that we have not secured a birth certificate for our son and I am afraid that his retention in school may be affected. Taking birth certificate for the child may expose our relationship because both of us must be present when registering the birth certificate at the registration offices. There are very high chances that we can meet people that we know at the birth certificate registration offices.

The secretive nature of *small house* families makes it difficult to secure birth certificates for children growing up in such households. It is important to note that securing a birth certificate is a fundamental right for all children and for Zimbabwe birth certificates give children access to education, hence denying children a birth certificate is a violation of their rights. According to Chapter 1 Article 6 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), as well as Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), every child has the right to a legally registered name officially recognised by the government. Lack of birth certificates may affect children's school attendance as shown in the examples above. By implication this results in denying children access to education which is yet another violation of the children's rights. Parents are expected to uphold Article 11 of the ACRWC as well as Article 28 of the CRC, which emphasise that every child has the right to access a good quality education. To this end, Mazembo et al (2013:12) postulate that responsible and engaged

fathers, who do their share of parenting work, are beneficial to the development of children and to building families and societies that better reflect gender equity and protect child rights.

7.4 CONCLUSION

It has been noted that family background remains critical for children's socialisation and schooling. The family has been seen to play two main functions: socialisation and the provision of resources for schooling. In this regard, absent fatherhood in *small house* households may be seen as leading to single parenthood. Thus, absent economic fatherhood and subsequent lack of financial capital tend to affect the provision of schooling resources in *small house* families. The interviews with the men and women in *small house* relationships revealed that most of the parents in these relationships struggle to pay school fees for their children. This results in child labour and erratic school attendance, which affect the academic performance of the children growing up in such households. Similarly, disengaged fatherhood in *small house* households leads to behavioural problems in the children growing up in such contexts, which in turn may affect their schooling. It is argued in this study that the provision of schooling resources in *small house* families takes a gender dimension where the girl child is greatly disadvantaged. It has been noted that parents in *small house* households prefer to pay school fees for their boy children at the expense of the girl child's education. It is important to note that such thinking is influenced by hegemonic masculinity which is a manifestation of deeply entrenched patriarchal hegemony in Shona society, which tends to undermine the education of the girl child as it concomitantly values the labour of the girl child in the home. In other words, the stereotypical perceptions of the economic value of the girl child through marriage and subsequent motherhood (Makaudze, 2015:266; Mazuru & Nyambi, 2012) tend to depress the demand for the girl child's education. Thus, poverty in *small house* households tends to affect the provision of education for the girl child. However, in all these dynamics, women's agency should not be undermined as they are seen making an effort to eke a living through working in the informal sector under very difficult and harsh economic conditions prevailing in the country. Some small house women have been seen to be very assertive as they insist that their daughters should attend school. Nonetheless, it can be concluded that absent fatherhood and subsequent single parenthood render the *small house* household a problematic context for raising children in contemporary Shona society. In addition, the in-depth interviews revealed that a number of children's fundamental rights tend to be violated in the context of *small house* households as fathers abdicate their responsibilities.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter draws on the research findings to derive at the conclusions of the study and to make recommendations with regard to policy planning and policy making. The contributions this study makes are underscored, focusing on the practical and theoretical implications of the notions of hegemonic masculinity, gendered social exchanges, disengaged fatherhood, and lone parenthood as they relate to the *small house* phenomenon vis-à-vis the welfare of women, men and their children living in such contexts. The study sought to address the main research question: **What are the perceptions on gender dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon as an emerging family structure in contemporary Zimbabwean society?** The conclusions of the research findings are guided by specific sub-research questions. The study was underpinned by social exchange theory and African feminism as the theoretical framework and a qualitative paradigm was applied as the research approach. The chapter ends by discussing the limitations of the study and making recommendations for policy planning and development.

8.2 CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions of the study are discussed in terms of the major themes that emerged from the data collected and are linked to specific sub-research questions.

8.2.1 The Relationship between the *Small house* Phenomenon and Polygyny

The *small house* relationship has become a reality in the contemporary Shona society. The study revealed that although the *small house* relationship tends to be influenced by the ideals of polygyny, it differs from polygyny in important respects. Notably are the facts that the *small house* relationship remains largely secretive and that in many cases *roora* is not paid hence the relationship remains unsanctioned by the Shona society. The juxtaposition of polygyny and the *small house* relationship reveals that the proliferation of the *small house* phenomenon among the Shona people of Zimbabwe tends to be influenced by its relative compatibility with the contemporary socio-economic dispensation. From a man's perspective, the *small house* phenomenon becomes an innovation by some Shona men to circumvent the obligations and provisions of the civil marriage. In sum, the responses from the men and women in *small house* relationships indicated that the relationship may be informed by the ideals of traditional Shona

polygynous marital practices and thus gender inequalities in such marital relationships are perpetuated. These findings thus answer the research sub-question: **Is the *small house* phenomenon based on patriarchal traditions associated with polygyny in Shona society?**

8.2.2 Sexuality and Masculinity in *Small house* Relationships

Perceptions of sexuality and masculinity in *small house* relationships found in this study are consistent with the ideals of the Shona cultural imperatives which tend to emphasise a patriarchal hegemony that threatens the very humanity of women by reducing them to sex objects. In various interviews with the men in *small house* relationships, it emerged that they believe that it is their prerogative to have several sexual partners and to decide when and how they should have sex. The *small house* relationship becomes a manifestation of this masculine mentality and patriarchal tendencies which perceive men's sexual virility as synonymous with several sexual relationships. At its worse, this mentality has revealed that certain men in *small house* relationships force their partners to be intimate with them against their will. In other words, the social construction of masculinity in the Shona culture in general and the *small house* relationship in particular tends to violate women's rights and compromise their integrity by imposing men's control over women's bodies and sexuality. Thus in the context of *small house* relationships, masculinity and sexuality are perceived as structuring and constraining each other and at times culminating in the subordination of women. Hence these findings addressed the sub-question: **How do gender dynamics in *small house* families influence social exchanges between partners and the nature of the relationship?**

8.2.3 The *Small house* Relationship: An Alternative Route to Motherhood

Sentiments expressed by both the male and female participants point to the desire to have a child (motherhood) as another cause of *small house* relationships. Women's agency is thus reflected in resorting to *small house* relationships to escape the stigma (*tsikombi*) attached to unattached and childless women. Raising children in the context of marriage and family is a desirable aim in the Shona culture. Views expressed by the participants revealed that an unmarried woman, particularly one without children, falls short of this, at times, glorified image of "complete womanhood" in Shona society in particular and African culture in general. Some responses indicated that such single women can even be perceived as having spiritual husbands and hence they cannot marry. Such metaphysical beliefs illustrate the extent to which gender disparities are entrenched in Shona cultural narratives; even in their religious beliefs it is the woman who is cursed and not the man. It is for this reason that women in Shona society

who fail to secure a so-called sanctified and dignified marriage may decide to settle for a *small house* relationship to ensure that they at least attain the status of motherhood. In other words, most women in *small house* relationships considered this relatively stable secretive sexual relationship when attempts to have a monogamous marriage had failed.

8.2.4 The Diaspora Phenomenon and the *Small house* Relationship

During the interviews, almost all participants lamented the fact that the political and economic crises currently prevailing in Zimbabwe had negatively affected their family life. In this regard, Sadomba (2011) observed that Zimbabwe's unplanned or FTLR has had ripple effects in society leading to economic collapse and political crisis which have pushed many Zimbabweans across borders looking for employment. In colonial Zimbabwe, labour migrancy was associated with men as women were not allowed in urban areas though through their agency time after time women were found in these forbidden enclaves (Barnes, 1992 & Schmidt, 1991). Unlike the traditional labour migrancy in Zimbabwe (Hattori et al 2008), the growing diaspora enabled more women to cross borders and look for employment as well. It should be noted that the movement by the Zimbabweans into the diaspora separated husbands from their wives leaving many marriages more susceptible to extramarital relationships. Sentiments expressed in various interviews with the men and women in *small house* relationships underscored that the economic crises in Zimbabwe and the subsequent diaspora phenomenon have tended to separate spouses for long periods of time, putting them in the way of temptation which has in some cases culminated in *small house* relationships among the Shona. Thus the performance of a society's economy can have a direct bearing on the structure of the marriage institution and family dynamics.

8.2.5 *Roora* in *Small House* Relationships

Another issue that was raised frequently in interviews with the men and women in *small house* relationships has to do with the payment of *roora*. It emerged that most men did not pay *roora* for their *small house* partners. This renders this relationship problematic because for the Shona people an acceptable marriage is sanctified by *roora*, hence the failure to pay *roora* in *small house* relationships refutes the Shona cultural imperatives. However, there seems to be dialectical perceptions of the relevance of *roora* for the marriage institution in the contemporary Shona society. A few of the female participants totally dismissed the relevance of *roora* in a marriage. From certain African feminists' perspectives (Gaidzanwa, 2010 & Goredema, 2010), the Shona cultural practice of *roora* payment perpetuates gender inequalities

and asymmetrical relations in marriage institutions. Some women in *small house* relationships feel that payment of *roora* reduces them to the level of an item that is sold and bought at a market. Similarly, from a social exchange perspective the payment of *roora* perpetuates gendered social exchanges in marital relationships. According to social exchange theorists, the one who brings more into the relationship has more power to mediate the nature of the relationship. Based on the data collected from the fieldwork, I would argue that the women who held such views were those with a fairly high level of education and who were gainfully employed. Though debatable, women in *small house* relationships have some degree of autonomy because they are not bound by the payment of *roora*. On the contrary, some participants perceive *roora* as conferring dignity to the woman. To this end, Shope, (2006) contends that *lobolo* affirmed women's value and remains a symbol of respect and acts as a women's charter of liberty, upholding the worthiness of women. There is thus not a singular view on the issue of *roora*, although this study suggests that other factors such as individual women's positions in society may influence perceptions.

8.2.6 Challenges and Social Problems in *Small House* Relationships

The *small house* relationship tends to be inundated with a myriad of social problems because of the secretive nature of the relationship. From the different interviews with the men and women in *small house* relationships, it emerged that social problems and challenges experienced in *small house* relationships include financial constraints, gender-based violence, increased susceptibility to STIs (and specifically HIV and AIDS) and loneliness among others. This section therefore answered the sub-research question: **What challenges and benefits are experienced by partners in the *small house* relationship?**

8.2.6.1 Financial Constraints

Sentiments expressed by the men and women in *small house* relationships reveal the serious financial constraints experienced in such households. It has been observed that poverty in such typical single parent households tends to be exacerbated by the fact that men find themselves with two families to support materially and financially. It is clear from the views expressed by the male participants that men find it a daunting task to provide for two households. During the interviews the men revealed serious budgetary constraints that may result in stressful experiences as the fathers feel emasculated because they cannot provide for their families. Thus, women as single parents in *small house* households fail to provide food for the children,

or pay rent and other bills. As noted, there were exceptions where women are employed and they also seem to have more power in the relationship.

I argue in this study that there is an incompatibility between the *small house* relationship (that draws to some extent on the traditional polygynous marital practice) and the contemporary socio-economic dispensation. In the past, the polygynous marital relationship was compatible with the socioeconomic dispensation because wives and children engaged in agricultural activities that helped to produce food for the family (Boserup 2007). The current situation in *small house* families tends to be exacerbated by the fact that it is typically an urban phenomenon and is clandestinely maintained; hence resources cannot be shared openly and equitably. Shona cultural norms prescribe the characteristics of a well-brought-up woman (emphasised femininity) as being quiet and obedient; hence men tend to take advantage of this, abdicating their responsibility as financial providers in *small house* relationships.

8.2.6.2 Gender-based Violence in *Small House* households

Sentiments expressed by many participants in this study point to a volatile and unstable relationship characterised by conflictual experiences. In other words, gender-based violence appears to be unexceptional in *small house* relationships in contemporary Shona society; it is worsened by its secretive nature and lack of social approval. It was observed that conflict between partners is a result of constrained financial and material resources and suspicions of infidelity since partners do not live together.

Although patriarchy has been observed to be one of the causes for women's subordination in *small house* relationships, its conceptualisation remains problematic since it implies a monolithic system of oppression in which all men dominate all women, thus obscuring the agency portrayed by some women in *small house* relationships. In this regard, the processes by which male dominance is constructed and maintained in *small house* relationships tend to be complex and subtle, hence patriarchal tendencies in such relationships may not be simplistically generalised. For women in *small house* relationships, social exchanges involve bargaining with men whose patriarchal orientation remains deeply entrenched and this demonstrates women's agency in fighting a practice deeply rooted in African culture and history. Thus in some cases women in *small house* relationships were seen shaping the conditions of their relationships despite the constraining power of patriarchy. The agency for women in *small house* relationships in the Harare metropolitan province is also revealed by the

fact that most of them are working in the informal industry in an effort to secure the basic needs for survival.

Interviews with the women in *small house* relationships revealed that some women are at times forced to be intimate with their partners after they have been brutally assaulted. It is argued in this study that women suffer in exploitative relationships because of poverty and the belief that conflicts are natural in heterosexual relationships. The fact that the term ‘marital rape’ does not exist in Shona cultural narratives reveals the extent to which violent tendencies are deeply entrenched in the masculine mystique; men believe that sex, including forced sex, is their right. For women to be emancipated from patriarchal oppression expressed through gender-based violence in *small house* relationships there is a need to deconstruct perceptions on masculinity and femininity in both men and women in society.

8.2.6.3 The *Small House* relationship and HIV/AIDS

From the different interviews with the men and women in *small house* relationships, it emerged that such relationships are often just one of multiple concurrent relationships. This increases the susceptibility of the parties involved to HIV. As men in these relationships use culture to justify their philandering behaviour, women in Zimbabwe continue to face the violation of their sexual rights because of a historically and artificially maintained discourse of ‘our culture’ or ‘our tradition’ (Kambarami 2006). For the Shona people, the conditions for having sex are set by men and because of certain stereotypical perceptions of femininity in the Shona culture, women are unable to negotiate safe ways of having sex. It was observed during the interviews that most of the women were unwilling to talk about sexual matters (this might have been exacerbated by the fact that I am a male researcher and they did not feel free to discuss such matters). Although women’s silence may indicate their resistance or a strategy to avoid gender-based violence, it may be viewed as a cause for their suffering when they are intimate with their partners without any protection, even though they may be aware that their partners are promiscuous. It is thus argued in this study that *small house* relationships are a fertile ground for the spread of HIV (and other STIs) because partners treat each other as permanent partners and yet they spend little time together.

8.2.7 Family Background and Schooling

The study explored the *small house* family as a context for socialising children and providing resources for schooling. In doing so, the following sub-research question was addressed: **What**

are the implications of absent fatherhood in *small house* households for the child's socialisation and schooling?

8.2.7.1 Absent Fatherhood and Socialisation

Responses from the different interviews with the men and women in *small house* relationships show that continuous absent fatherhood tends to culminate in a detached bond between the father and his children. Consequently, children develop behavioural problems as they lack a role model, bearing in mind that the mother (a single parent) tends to be overwhelmed by her domestic and economic responsibilities. In other words, absent fatherhood relegates economic responsibilities to the mother who in turn is left with no time to monitor her children's behaviour. In this regard, absent fatherhood and subsequent single parenthood in the context of the *small house household* result in behavioural problems being exhibited by the children who grow up in such contexts. The findings of this study indicate that certain mothers in *small house* families know little about the whereabouts of their children, how they spend the day and who they play with, which points to a lack of monitoring of children's behaviour. Although fathers in *small house* households are expected to comply with their social and economic obligations, they tend to be restrained by the secretive nature of the *small house* relationship and the economic crisis currently prevailing in the country. With regard to the behavioural problems cited in various interview excerpts, it can be strongly argued that the disengaged fatherhood has serious implications for the wellbeing and behaviour of children growing up in *small house* households.

8.2.7.2 Absent Fatherhood and Schooling

It emerged from the interviews that the *small house* household is a problematic context for child socialisation and an unreliable family context for providing resources for children's schooling. Structurally, the *small house* household resembles a single parent household and as such it tends to be beset by financial constraints as is the case with most female single-parent families (Moghadam 2005:8-9). The study established that lack of financial capital and social commitment in *small house* families becomes detrimental to the welfare, socialisation and schooling of children growing up in such households. The sporadic visits by the father, because of the delicacy and secretive nature of the *small house* relationship, make it difficult to provide enough resources for children's schooling. It would also seem the father ends up having too many children to send to school and gives preference to children born from his marriage.

Another issue that emerged from the interviews is that absent fatherhood results in the mother being overwhelmed by responsibilities thereby compromising supervision of children's homework assigned by teachers and this may result in academic underachievement. Generally, absent fatherhood in *small house* households impacts negatively on the schooling of children.

The sentiments expressed by many men and women in *small house* relationships point to an impoverished family context with pervasive financial constraints which in turn have grave implications for the schooling of children growing up in such contexts. Resources in *small house* households tend to be overstretched because the father is expected to provide for two households; consequently, partners in *small house* households struggle to raise school fees and other learning resources like stationery and uniforms. Interviews with the men and women in *small house* relationships revealed that because of poverty, some parents in *small house* households tend to send their children to schools with lower fees in high density suburbs or even rural schools which may offer sub-standard education due to fewer resources. Such parents also fail to pay for educational trips which are beneficial to children's education. It is thus strongly argued that absent fatherhood and the subsequent lack of financial and social capital in *small house* families is detrimental to the schooling of children growing up in such contexts.

8.2.7.3 Gender and Schooling

Basing on the data collected during the interviews, it can be argued that the provision of schooling resources in the context of the *small house* household takes a gender dimension. Several participants (both men and women) indicated that they were not perturbed by their failure to raise school fees for their girl children in *small house* households because they believe that at least girls have the option of marriage if they fail to do well in school. The fact that some *small house* women resist to have their daughters drop out of school reflects their assertiveness and agency. Nonetheless, Dorsey (in Nekatibeb 2002) elaborates that in many African societies the importance of brideprice and the value accorded to marriage and subsequent motherhood depresses the demand for female education. It is argued in this study that gender dynamics in *small house* households are informed by Shona cultural and stereotypical perceptions of femininity and masculinity, which on the whole devalue the notion of education for the girl child.

Generally, it was observed that lack of financial capital in *small house* families affects the education of children growing up in such contexts and the situation is even worse for the girl children. Absent fatherhood in *small house* households violates Article 18 of the CRC, which emphasises that both parents should share the responsibility for bringing up their children. Thus, discriminatory tendencies on the basis of gender in providing schooling resources are a violation of children's fundamental rights.

8.2.7.4 Lack of Birth Certificates and Retention in School

Securing birth certificates for children is another challenge experienced in *small house* households and which can affect children's schooling. The secretive nature of the relationship makes it difficult to secure birth certificates for children growing up in such households. This situation is exacerbated by the sporadic availability of the father. It is important to note that securing a birth certificate is a fundamental right for all children. Thus, failing to secure a birth certificate is a violation of the child's rights. Securing birth certificates for children in *small house* relationships takes a gender dimension as efforts are made to secure birth certificates for the boy child ignoring the girl child. Interviews with various men and women in the *small house* relationships also revealed that the lack of a birth certificate affects children's retention in school as students are not allowed to sit for public examinations without birth certificates. It is observed here that the *small house* household context tends to violate several children's rights.

The findings of this study confirm that the relationship between family background and children's schooling remains critical. Based on the views expressed by various participants in the interviews, it can be argued that the *small house* household is a problematic context for raising children and providing resources for their schooling.

8.3 CONTRIBUTION OF THIS STUDY

This study makes theoretical and practical contributions to the study of social and gender dynamics in families and the welfare of children growing up in contemporary families. The study utilised the social exchange theory and African feminism to create a comprehensive appreciation of the gender dynamics of the *small house* phenomenon. One of the major weaknesses of the social exchange theory is its oversimplification of human actions; it explains human interactions mainly in terms of costs and rewards leaving out other factors. In doing so, the theory's application to changing social values and structures in the context of intimate

relationship like the *small house* relationship becomes problematic. This study thus propounds that the social exchange theory glosses over the nuances, subtleties and complexities of intimate relationships by reducing them to simplistic and mechanical generalisations. Thus principles of the social exchange theory can be expanded to include context, gender, social class, age, emotions and attachment bonds as other determinants of the dynamics of intimate relationships.

A critical analysis of social exchange theory reveals that it tends to focus on short-term relationships with perceivable transactions between the interested parties. Nevertheless, the theory can be expanded to capture the unforeseeable transactions that come with long-term relationships like the *small house*. The study therefore adds the following principles to social exchange theory: **Unanticipated benefits that are realised through long-term relationships tend to fortify such relationships, thereby discouraging parties from terminating the relationship. Women's agency in social exchanges involves bargaining with men to resist unequal exchanges in intimate relationships.**

It is postulated that in the Shona culture in particular and the African culture in general, men tend to command more marital power because of the patriarchal hegemony prevalent in such societies. Thus, men have the propensity to mediate the trajectory and conditions of the marital and other intimate relationships. Although gender inequalities are conspicuous in *small house* relationships because women are sharing a male partner, women's agency in such relationships should not be undermined. Sustaining such a relationship does not therefore always depend on perceived mutual benefits, as Homans (1961) and Blau (1964) argue; a woman's stay in such a relationship may be mediated by the stigma attached to unattached and childless women in the Shona society. Thus, for some women, the *small house* relationship becomes a relationship of convenience. In other words, stereotypical perceptions of masculinity and femininity constitute the justification for a relationship; hence social exchanges in a marital relationship become gendered. This partially explains why women are less likely to walk out of a dysfunctional and exploitative relationship.

The patterns of gender dynamics in *small house* relationships have been observed to be difficult to pin down because of the complexity and elusiveness of the relationship. The study employed African feminism as refractive lenses to illuminate gender dynamics in *small house* relationships. As already discussed, the African feminist discourse and political practice is neither monolithic nor homogenous in its analysis of gender relations in African societies.

African feminism illuminated the unique nuances and subtleties of social exchanges between partners in *small house* relationships. Without withstanding the challenges experienced by women in *small house* relationships, the study reveals the *small house* women's agency in eking a living and raising children under very difficult and harsh economic climate prevailing in the country with very little or no support from their male partners. From a woman's perspective the *small house* relationship reflects their innovativeness in coming up with an alternative to marriage which can accord them the much revered motherhood status in the Shona society.

Gender dynamics in the *small house* relationship tend to affect the welfare of and education provision for children growing up in such family contexts. The study has established that the provision for schooling resources in *small house* families assumes a gender dimension greatly affecting the girl child's access to school. The study also established that at times the *small house* relationship may be perceived as a manifestation of the reverence placed on marriage and subsequent motherhood in Shona society. Finally, the study established that the pains and gains in a *small house* relationship are mere social constructs that remain subjective, relative and contextual, but which nevertheless tend to mediate the social dynamics of a relationship.

8.4. LIMITATIONS

The delicacy and secretive nature of the *small house* relationship made it very difficult to gain entry to the field of study. Some prospective participants whom I thought had critical information to convey, declined to be interviewed and that became a major setback. Others were under the impression that I wanted to publish a book that would state their names and discuss their *small house* relationship. Others mistook me for a reporter with *H-Metro*, a popular newspaper in the Harare metropolitan province which writes regularly on relationship issues, particularly cheating and infidelity. Being a male researcher was in itself a stumbling block as some female participants were not free to talk about sexuality. Sexuality is a contentious issue among Africans treated with some degree of sacredness (Uchendu, 2008). I also noted that some male participants declined to introduce me to their *small house* partners because they took me for a potential suitor. I had to rely on those who volunteered to give information and I only stopped collecting data when I had reached data saturation.

One other limitation was that some participants refused to be audio-recorded. It then became a daunting task to capture everything that the participants said. The tone of voice in a discussion

is critical because it communicates feelings of distress, excitement, contentment, resentment among others. Such feelings were critical when interpreting the social and gender dynamics in the *small house* relationship. In any event, I had to rely on shorthand to take notes on the most important issues raised by the participants during the interviews.

The study also established that absent fatherhood and subsequent single parenthood in *small house* households render such households problematic contexts in which to raise and socialise children. The relationship between the *small house* household background and schooling was not adequately explored. However, gaining access to schools and interviewing teachers on the challenges they face with students from *small house* households and gaining the views of the children themselves was beyond the scope of this study. Since no children were interviewed, the study relies on the parents' reporting on their children. This limitation implies a one sided picture on children growing up in *small house* households. This therefore remains a grey area which warrants further research so as to create a comprehensive appreciation of the relationship between the *small house* household and the education of the child.

8.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on findings of the study, recommendations are made that will be useful for policy planning and development. This could result in the improvement of living conditions in the context of families and society in general.

Findings from the study indicate that women in *small house* relationship are taken advantage of by men because of deeply entrenched hegemonic masculinity inculcated by the Shona culture. Women enter *small house* relationships to obtain assistance in paying rent and other bills; in doing so, the social exchanges in such relationships become gendered as men, because of patriarchy, assume more marital power to mediate the conditions of the relationship. Thus women in *small house* relationships tend to bargain with men with regards to social exchanges. The findings of the study also indicate that those women in *small house* relationships who are educated and gainfully employed have autonomy and power to decide the destiny of their relationship. It is against this backdrop that the need to have robust perception reorientation workshops and policies to empower the girl child from a young age and encourage girls to complete at least secondary school is postulated.

Gender dynamics in the provision of schooling resources in *small house* families also point to deeply entrenched patriarchal tendencies which devalue the education of the girl child. There

is a need for further research in this area where school teachers are interviewed on the challenges faced at school by the girl child from the *small house* household. Such a study could also interview children to ascertain their experiences. Such data would then assist in planning and developing new policies on the rights and privileges of the girl child. In the same vein, schools should be targeted for turning children away from school. To increase children's access to school, birth certificate rules should be changed to so that fathers do not have to be listed if the mother indicates him as unknown.

Although the payment of *roora* remains highly valued by Shona society, there is a need to consult with women because some women regard it as a cause of unequal social exchanges in marital relationships. Women should at least have a say in the payment of *roora* and should be allowed to make a decision on it in regard to their relationship. Arguments have been raised that state that *roora* reduces women to the level of items sold in a market, although there are alternative views. It is thus recommended that another comprehensive study on the perceptions of women on *roora* be conducted. This will assist in coming up with a well-informed policy on *roora* payment in contemporary society.

Gender-based violence in *small house* relationships is a manifestation of the patriarchal nature of Shona society. Such violence was noted as being rife in *small house* households with the woman as its victim. It was noted that violence in *small house* households assumes various forms with physical, emotional and sexual abuse being the most common. The provisions of the Domestic Violence Act of Zimbabwe are protective of women but interviews with the women in *small house* relationships indicated that they lack knowledge on the provisions of this Act. Workshops on the awareness of the provisions of this act should be held with women of different classes. To curb sexual abuse in marital relationships, the Marriage Act should be amended to include the possibility of being convicted for marital (and other forms of intimate relationship) rape. In the same vein, hospitals should be targeted for screening patients for domestic abuse.

Many of the problems and challenges experienced in *small house* relationships were noted to be a result of the fact that the relationship is clandestinely maintained and the situation tends to be exacerbated by the economic crisis currently prevailing in the country. Men want to maintain a type of polygynous marital relationship albeit disguised to suit the contemporary economic dispensation and their own needs. Therefore, men need to be educated on the implications of maintaining secretive and unsanctioned marital relationships for the welfare of

the women and children in such families. There should be punitive and prohibitive laws against parents who abdicate their responsibilities regarding both their children and spouses. Discussions in the media on such issues could be of value in this regard.

The *small house* household has reportedly been a problematic context for raising children as a number of children's fundamental rights are easily violated. Absent fatherhood and subsequent lone parenthood contribute to the challenges experienced in raising children in *small house* household contexts. Such challenges are exacerbated by the fact that many of the mothers are unemployed. Violation of children's fundamental rights in *small house* households has been seen to take a gender dimension where provision for the girl child's education is neglected. Against this backdrop, it is important to introduce civic education which covers marital issues, policies on children's welfare and human rights from primary school level up to tertiary education.

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ADDENDUM 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE FORM



SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENTAL RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

1 December 2015

Dear Mr Muchabaiwa

Ref #: 2015 SOCDERC 011

Name of applicant: W
Muchabaiwa

Student #: 53500595

Decision: Ethics Approval

Name: Mr Wonder Muchabaiwa (Supervisor: Prof ME Rabe)

Proposal: Perceptions on the dynamics and politics of the "small house" family structure in Harare province, Zimbabwe

Qualification: Doctoral degree

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Sociology Departmental Research Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Final approval is granted for the duration of the project.

The application was reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the Sociology Departmental Research Ethics Review Committee on 1 December 2015.

The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:

- 1) The researcher/s will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
- 2) Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should be communicated in writing to the Sociology Departmental Research Ethics Review Committee. An amended application could be requested if there are substantial changes from the existing proposal, especially if these changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants.
- 3) The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.

Note:

The reference number (2015_SOCDERC 011) should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication (e.g. Webmail, E-mail messages, letters) with the intended research participants, as well as with the Sociology Departmental Research Ethics Review Committee.

Kind regards,

Dr CG Thomas, Chair of the Department of Sociology



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ADDENDUM 2
CONSENT FORM

My name is Muchabaiwa Wonder and I am studying towards a doctoral degree in sociology. My study focuses on the experiences of *small house* partners and people's perceptions of this emerging household. I will interview more than 20 people in *small house* relationships who volunteer to participate in this study. If you agree to take part in this study, I shall record our conversation on audiotape. The interview may last up to an hour. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

I assure you that the information that you supply will be treated confidentially. I will use pseudonyms to hide your identity.

Consent

I, Muchabaiwa Wonder, will not divulge any confidential information availed during the interviews.

Signed _____ Date _____

As a participant my views shall not be directly linked to me.

I accept to take part in the research
I agree that our conversation can be recorded

Signed _____ Date _____

ADDENDUM 3 (ENGLISH VERSION)

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE *SMALL HOUSE* FEMALE PARTNER

My name is Muchabaiwa Wonder. I am interested in the experiences of *small house* partners in this emerging household. This interview will last for approximately one hour.

1. PERSONAL DETAILS

- Tell me who you are.
- How old are you?
- What is your highest qualification?

2. SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND

- What do you do for a living?
- Would you say you are financially stable?

3. REASONS FOR ENGAGING IN THE *SMALL HOUSE* UNION

- At what age did you engage in this relationship?
- Did your partner pay *roora*?
- For how long have you been in this relationship?
- Briefly explain the reasons for engaging in this union.

4. SOCIAL EXCHANGES AND TRADE-OFFS

- What do you see as benefits in this kind of relationship?

5. CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED IN SMALL UNIONS

- What can you say are the challenges or problems in this union?
- How do you compare these challenges with the gains in *small house* unions?

6. FREQUENCY OF VISITS BY THE HUSBANDS

- How often does your partner visit?
- What could be the reasons for his absence?
- During his absence how do you fill the ‘empty hours’?

7. THE WELFARE OF CHILDREN VIS-À-VIS ABSENT FATHERHOOD

- Do you have children?
- Are there any problems that you experience in raising children in the absence of the father?
- How do you describe the relationship between your children and their father?

8. ABSENT FATHERHOOD, SOCIALISATION AND SCHOOLING

- Do you observe any behaviour problems with your children?
- Have you ever had any challenges in raising fees for the children?

9. PERCEPTIONS ON THE *SMALL HOUSE* PRACTICE

- What are the attitudes of people towards *small house* unions?

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE *SMALL HOUSE* PHENOMENON

- Is your union known to relatives and the ‘main house’?

ADDENDUM 3 (SHONA VERSION)

MIBVUNZO YEMUKADZI WEMU'SMALL HOUSE'.

Zita rangu ndinonzi Wonder Muchabaiwa. Ndirikuita tsvakurudzo pema 'small house' semhuri itsva iri kunyuka mumatunhu avaShona mu Zimbabwe. Mibvunzo iyi ingangotora nguva ingasvika awa rimwechete.

1. RUZIVO PAMUSORO PEMUNHU

- Ungandiudzawa kuti unonzi ani?
- Unobva kumhuri yakadii (barika here kan kuti kwete)?
- Unemakore manganic?
- Wakadzidza kusvika papi?

2. MARARAMIRO

- Unoita basa rei?
- Chii chaungati ichi ndicho chinokupa mari yokuraramisa?
- Ko mari yokubhara rendi, magetsi, mvura, nechikoro kana kuchipatara unoiwanepi?
- Ngatitii paita dambudziko, unoona ani angakubatsira?

3. ZVIKONZERO ZVEKUPNDA MUWANONO YE "SMALL HOUSE"

- Wakapinda muwananoyi wava nemakore manganic?
- Wakabvisirwa pfuma here?
- Wava nenguva yakareba zvakadii wava muwanano iyi?
- Zvii zvakakusunda kuti upinde muwanano iyi?
- Pamakadanana waiziva here kuti mumwe wako ane mukadzi?

4. ZVAKANAKIRA WANANO YE "SMALL HOUSE"

- Semaonero ako ndezvipi zvakanakira wanano iyi?
- Ndezvipi zvaungati ndizvo zvakashatira wanano iyi?

5. MATAMBUDZIKO ANOWANIKWA MUWANONO YE "SMALL HOUSE"

- Ndezvipi zvimhingamupinyi muwanano iyi?
- Kana matambudziko anowanikwa muwanano iyi achienzaniswa nezvakanakira wanano iyi zvakamira sei?

6. KUSHANYA KWEMURUME KUSMALL HOUSE

- Umwe wenyu anoshanya kangani pavhiki kana pamwedzi?
- Anoti iye anege akabatika nei paanotadza kuuya?
- Saka paanenge asipo imi munozvivaraidza nei?

7. KUSABATIKA KWABABA NENDARAMO YEVANA

- Mune vana here muwanano iyi?
- Mune matambudziko amunowana here pakuchengeta vana ava pasina baba vavo?
- Mungatsanangura sei ukama hwababa navana vavo?

8. KUSABATIKA KWABABA, UNHU NEDZIDZA KWEVANA

- Pangaite dambudziko here pamuso peunhu kana tsika dzevana venyu?
- Munombotita dambudziko here pamusoro pekubhara mari dzechikoro?

9. MAONERWO EWANANO DZEMA “*SMALL HOUSE*”

- Ko vanhu vanotora sei vahu vari muwanano dzema “*small house*”?

10. KUGASHIRIKA KWEMA *SMALL HOUSE*

- Wanano yenyu iyi inozivikanwa here nehama pamwe navahosi?

ADDENDUM 4 (ENGLISH VERSION)

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE MALE PARTNER

My name is Muchabaiwa Wonder. I am interested in the experiences of *small house* partners in this emerging household. This interview will last for approximately one hour.

1. PERSONAL DETAILS

- Tell me who you are.
- How old are you?
- What is your highest qualification?

2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

- What do you do for a living?
- Would you think you are financially stable?

3. REASONS FOR ENGAGING IN THE *SMALL HOUSE* UNION

- At what age were you ‘married’?
- Did you pay roora for the *small house* partner?
- For how long have you been ‘married’ to your *small house* partner?
- Briefly explain the reasons for engaging in this marital union.

4. SOCIAL EXCHANGES AND TRADE-OFFS

- What do you see as benefits in this kind of marital relationship?

5. CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED IN *SMALL HOUSEHOLDS*

- What can you say are the challenges or problems in this marital union?
- How do you compare these challenges with the gains in *small house* unions?

6. FREQUENCY OF VISITS BY THE MALE PARTNERS

- How often do you visit your *small household*?
- How do explain your absence both to the main house and the *small house*?

7. THE WELFARE OF CHILDREN VIS-À-VIS ABSENT FATHERHOOD

- Do you have children with your *small house* partner?
- Are there any problems that you experience in raising children in the *small house* family?
- How do you describe the relationship between you and the *small house* children?

8. PERCEPTIONS ON THE *SMALL HOUSE* PRACTICE

- What are the attitudes of people towards *small house* unions?

9. ABSENT FATHERHOOD, SOCIALISATION AND SCHOOLING

- Have ever you observed any behaviour problems with your children?
- Have you ever had any challenges in raising fees for the children?

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE *SMALL HOUSE* PHENOMENON

- Is your small house relationship known to relatives and the ‘main house’?

ADDENDUM 4 (SHONA VERSION)

MIBVUNZO YEMURUME WEMU ‘SMALL HOUSE’

Zita rangu ndinonzi Wonder Muchabaiwa. Ndirikuita tsvakurudzo pema ‘*small house*’ semhuri itsva iri kunyuka mumatunhu avaShona mu Zimbabwe. Mibvunzo iyi ingangotora nguva ingasvika awa rimwechete.

1. RUZIVO PAMUSORO PEMUNHU

- Ungandiudzawo kuti unonzi ani?
- Unobva kumhuri yakadii barika here kana kuti kwete?
- Unemakore manganic?
- Wakadzidza kusvika papi?

2. MARARAMIRO

- Unoita basa rei rinokupa ndaramo?
- Chii chaicho chinonyanyokupai mari yokuraramisa?
- Kana iri nyaya yemari tingati zvakamira sei, inokukwanirai here?

3. ZVIKONZERO ZVEKUPINDA MUWANANO YE “SMALL HOUSE”

- Mune muchato here nemukadzi wenyu chaiye?
- Makapinda muwanano ye”*small house*” mava nenguva yakadii maroora?
- Makabvisa pfuma here pamudzimai wenyu uyu?
- Mava nenguva yakareba zvakadii mava muwanano iyi?
- Zvii zvakakusundai kuti mupinde muwanano iyi?
- Pamakadanana mumwe wenyu aiziva here mune mukadzi nechakare?

4. ZVAKANAKIRA WANANO YE”SMALL HOUSE”

- Semaonero enyu ndezvipi zvakanakira wanano iyi?
- Ndezvipiwo zvakashatira wanano iyi?

5. MATAMBUDZIKO MUWANONO DZESMALL HOUSE

- Ndeapi matambudziko anosanganwa nawo muwananondzema”*small house*”?
- Kana tichienzanisa zvakanakira wananoiye nematambudziko anowanikwa mo zvakamira sei?

6. KUSHANYA KU ‘SMALL HOUSE’

- Munoshanya kangani kus*small house*?
- Munotsanangura muchitii kusabatika kwenyu ku ‘*small house*’ kana kuna vahosi?

7. KUSABATIKA KWABABA KUSMALL HOUSE NENDURAMO YEVANA

- Mune vana here ne ‘*small house*’ yenyu?
- Pane matambudziko amunosangana nawo here pakuchengeta vana ve’*small house*’?
- Ukama hwenu nevana veku’*small house*’hwakamira sei?

8. MAONERWO EWANANO DZESMALL HOUSE

- Vanhu vanotora sei vanhu vari muwanano dze’*small house*’?”

9. KUSABATIKA KWABABA, UNHU NEKUDZIDZA KWEVANA

- Vana venyu veku ‘*small house*’vakamira sei kana tichitarisa unhu hwavo?
- Mungaite dambudziko here pakubhadhara mari yechikora dzevana ava?

10. KUGASHIRIKA KWEWANONO DZEMA ‘SMALL HOUSE’

- Wanano yenyu iyi inozivikanwa here kuhama pamwe navahosi?

ADDENDUM 5 (ENGLISH VERSION)

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW WITH THE FEMALE *SMALL HOUSE* PARTNER

1. May you explain how you spend your day?
2. Are your friends in *small house* relationships as well?
3. What issues do you normally discuss?
4. Besides this partner of yours, do you have other sexual partners?
5. When you have a problem, whom do you consult for help?
6. Do you have personal savings in the bank or in person?
7. Who buys food for your family?
8. Who pays for rentals and electricity?
9. The birth certificates of your children are registered in whose name?

Relations with the partner's kin

1. Are you known to your partner's relatives?
2. How would you describe your relationship with your partner's relatives?
3. Do you attend funerals or weddings of your partner's relatives?
4. Suppose you attend, are you allowed to perform the duties expected of a daughter-in-law in the Shona culture?
5. If you are in conflict with your partner, whom do you normally consult?
6. Do you visit your partner's relatives? Or do they pay you visits?
7. How would you describe the relationship between your parents and your partner's parents?

ADDENDUM 5 (SHONA VERSION)

HURUKURO NEMUDZIMAI WEMU ‘*SMALL HOUSE*’ YECHIPIRI

1. Mungatsanangure here zvamunoswera muchiita zuva rose?
2. Koshamwari dzenyu ma ‘*small house*’ wo here?
3. Ndezvipi zvamunonyanyotaura kana muri pachenyu?
4. Koi mi hamunawo zvimwe zvikomba here? Kana munazvo, nemhaka yei munazvo?
5. Kana paita rubatsiro munoona ani kuti muwane rubatsiro?
6. Mungaitawo mari kubhanga kana pachenyu?
7. Anotenga zvokudya mumba ndiani?
8. Ko anobhadhara rendi nemagetsi ndiani?
9. Ko vana ava vari muzita raani pazvitupa zvavo zvokuzvarwa nazvo?

Ukama nedzimwe hama dzemhuri

1. Unozivikanwa kuhama dzemurume wako here?
2. Ungatsanangura kuti ukama hwako nehama idzi hwakamira sei?
3. Unotenderwa here kuenda kunhamo michato kana imwe mitambo yekumusha kwemurume wako?
4. Kana waenda unotendererwa here kuita chiroora sezvinotarisirwa mutsika dze Chishona?
5. Ndiani anogadzirisa makakatanwa pakati pako nemurume wako?
6. Unomboshanyirwawo here nehama dzemurume? Kana kuti iwe unomboshanyirwawo here?
7. Ko hukama hwevabereki vemurume wako nevabereki vako hwakamira sei?